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THE
EIGHTIES

Goodbye

to all

that.

Essays begin
on page 3.

E. German leaders caught between reform and reaction

By Gordon Lewis

EAST BERLIN

In what used to be one of Europe's most boring states events are moving with such speed that information that is valid today may be useless tomorrow. A population brought up in the belief that criticism—subtle or overt—could cost you and your family the future is now speaking up. On October 19 on *Aktuelle Kamera*, East German television's evening news, Egon Krenz, the former East German security chief who replaced Erich Honecker as general secretary the day before, is shown at a factory. A week earlier such a visit would have been nothing more than a propaganda exercise, with selected workers praising the leadership and calling on comrades to increase their efforts. This time is different. When the party leader asks a group of workers what can be done, a young man speaking heavy Berlin working-class slang says, "Well, for one, you might start telling the truth. Put some decent goods in the store and let us travel. Then people will stop skipping the country."

On the face of it, it would appear that reform is on the way. Nevertheless, people in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) remain skeptical. "My head is full of hope, but my belly is filled with fear," says one opposition activist. Bärbel Bohley, co-founder of Neues Forum, a recently organized and very influential "citizen's group," warns that the risk of a "heavenly peace" is still very acute. After all, the same Egon Krenz now calling for reform earlier this year congratulated the government of China on a "successful" action in Tiananmen Square when troops cracked down on pro-democracy demonstrators in June.

Right place at the right time: Krenz enjoyed anything but popularity before his selection as party leader in mid-October. He is the quintessential party hack, whose political opinions are based on probable Politburo majorities and not on conviction. Having risen through the ranks of the party youth organization FDJ, Krenz was following in Honecker's footsteps, and many considered him to be the party secretary's crown prince. As such, Krenz was a virtual imitation of the party secretary, hanging on and defending Honecker's every word even in the face of the mass exodus of citizens via Hungary.

Despite Krenz's unbroken fealty to Honecker, there were indications over the past two years that his star was fading. As head of the security apparatus, he was responsible for the breakup of two major demonstrations in late 1987 and early 1988, including the roughing-up of foreign press, which severely damaged Honecker's reputation in international circles. Then in May of this year independent poll watchers presented evidence that as head of the election commission he had sanctioned and participated in vote manipulation. On top of all this, Krenz is a notorious alcoholic who suffers from cirrhosis of the liver. With all this going against him, why did Krenz get the nod to succeed Honecker?

Simply because there was no other choice. Honecker could hardly be replaced with someone his own age. That left Krenz, who at 52 was the only young member of the leadership available. To choose someone outside of the Politburo would have discredited the leadership altogether.

Krenz has tough months ahead of him until his Socialist Unity Party (SED) congress meets next May. Treading political water and promoting openness without opening up have already failed to stem the tide of refugees flooding west. Even the announcement of a proposed new travel law has had no noticeable impact on the country's mood.

Even more dangerous to the ruling SED than the mass exodus is the reaction of the population at home. Far from settling down, the people still flood the streets. Peaceful marches and candlelight vigils occur every evening in cities across the country, with tens of thousands turning out. Resolutions have been passed in factories and theaters calling for support of Neues Forum and other reform groups. University students have formed a student council and plan to print their own newspaper. An independent union has been founded. Since October 7, police have not intervened in the face of the people's outburst, but at some point something has to give. The government will either institute true reform or it will have to crack down.

"Something snapped in the first week of October," says Bohley of Neues Forum. Indeed. The overwhelming majority of the East German population developed a class consciousness and with it an appreciation of their own strength.

The frustration and tension grew steadily throughout the summer as thousands of citizens turned their backs on the "peasants and workers state." By refusing to extradite East German citizens seeking to flee to the West, the Hungarians, Czechs and Poles proved that the SED's attempts to seal off the GDR from the influences of *glasnost* and *perestroika* were in vain. The East German party's efforts to create their own version of "socialism in one country" were, according to a student from East Berlin, "anti-historical, non-internationalist, and therefore not Marxist in the least." Still, such ideological qualms didn't stop the leadership from trying. After directing the construction of the so-called Anti-fascist Protection Wall in 1961, Honecker seemed prepared to turn his nation into an antiquated island of neo-Stalinism in a sea of *glasnost*—a Central European Albania of sorts.

Gorby to the rescue: Honecker's nemesis, Mikhail Gorbachov, put an end to any such thoughts. On the eve of the GDR's 40th anniversary celebration, at which the Soviet leader was to be the honored guest, Gorbachov made it clear that his attendance hinged on a "humanitarian resolution" of the refugee problem. Had Gorbachov not accepted the invitation, the GDR's pariah status would be clear for all to see. On the other hand, giving in to the demands of the runaway population would signal a serious loss of authority at home. It was a no-win situation, and one can't help but wonder whether the Soviet authorities, seeing a chance to weaken their unpopular vassal, planned it that way.

For the first time since the crisis began, Honecker made the right move and let his stubborn citizens emigrate, only to destroy its impact by making a decision that can only be explained in terms of an old man's injured pride. Rather than sending the refugees directly to the West, he demanded that the trains carrying them be routed over East German territory, in front of the eyes of an already restless population in the country's southern industrial regions. In doing so, the leadership attempted to show they were letting the people go and were not being coerced, but the move only fanned the flames of anger among the remaining population. Masses of people along the train route were met by armed police, who sealed off the stations. In Dresden, matters got out of hand and the police broke up the crowds with truncheons and water cannons.

Despite the growing tension in the streets, Gorbachov kept his word and arrived on October 6 for the anniversary celebrations. For the first time in years the people of East Germany and its leadership shared a common interest. What would Gorby say in his keynote address? Both sides wanted in essence to hear the same thing: a glimmer of hope in light of the mass exodus of citizens. For Honecker this meant a vocal show of support for the party. For the people it meant a call for reform.

The people were disappointed. While the Soviet leader alluded to the need for change, he did not criticize the SED. "East Germany," he said, "is a proven friend and ally. Decisions regarding its problems will be made not in Moscow but in Berlin."

The Soviet leader's presence in East Berlin and the authorities' almost-frenetic efforts to hide him from the general population on what was supposed to be a national holiday proved to be Honecker's final undoing. On the day of the anniversary celebration, East Berlin presented a picture of almost Kafkaesque perversity. Along the city's main thoroughfare, the Free German Youth marched in a torch-light parade, their only audience the political elite and hordes of uniformed police and plain-clothes state security agents. A few blocks away, the streets were deadly silent. Said one woman who lives nearby, "Imagine that. The government has a party to celebrate the state and forgets to invite the people."

Happy anniversary: The next day the leadership sponsored a "people's celebration" on the city's main square, Alexanderplatz. Suddenly a private discussion became a spontaneous march. "Help us, Gorby!" they shouted as marchers moved toward the Palace of the Republic where the state guests were being given a formal sendoff. The crowd, thousands strong, moved from the government quarter toward Prenzlauer Berg, the heart of residential East

INSIDE STORY

Berlin. And then, on the 40th anniversary of the republic, state security and police officers descended on the peaceful marchers and beat people indiscriminately—men, women and children. And the same thing was happening at that moment in cities across the country, including Leipzig, Dresden and Magdeburg.

Earlier, when the East was ideologically united, such a show of force would have been enough to thrust the population back into lethargy. But this time it had the opposite effect. After a tentative peace on Sunday the people were back on the streets on Monday. More than 100,000 gathered in Leipzig. Krenz, responsible for keeping order, held his men back. The next day the Politburo met and, after a bitter debate, a majority opted for a flexible approach to the growing unrest. According to insiders, Honecker did not try to intercede.

In the days that have followed the Politburo's change of course, the leadership has been desperately trying to regain the initiative without sacrificing its power. In his speech to the nation upon assuming power, Krenz called for a dialogue based on "rapid change and continuity," ignoring the obvious contradiction.

But not all party members are waffling. A new generation of party leaders from the southern industrial districts, long neglected by the central leadership, are speaking far more candidly and will certainly play a major role in the coming weeks and months—people like Dresden Mayor Wolfgang Berghofer or Dresden district boss Hans Modrow, a Gorbachov favorite who will almost certainly be elected to the Politburo in May. Gunther Schabowski, Berlin party chief, and his colleague from the city of Karl Marx Stadt, Siegfried Lorenz, are also considered potential candidates. These men have two things in common: they are products of regional, not national, party organizations and thus have intact power bases. They have also never been known to mince words, which is one reason why many of them never made it to Berlin while Honecker was still in power.

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"You've got me wrong," she said, "all wrong. I don't believe in God."
 "Then what do you believe in?"
 "History."
 He looked at her in astonishment for a moment, then laughed.
 "Oh Liz...oh no! You're not a bloody Communist?"

—John Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*

By Peter Karman

FUNNY HOW THINGS WORK OUT. THE '80s BEGAN with Americans and Soviets accusing each other of taking over the world and are ending with the world taking over the U.S. and the USSR. This amounts to yet another unforeseen outbreak of history. If life is what happens while people are busy making plans, history is what happens while they're making politics.

At the beginning of the '80s the Soviets and other philosophical materialists were still claiming to be history's social secretary with special responsibilities for the appointment book. For their part, the Americans were, as they still are, oblivious to history and unfriendly toward those who mentioned the subject. Why dig up the past, goes the national refrain, when we can strip-mine the future?

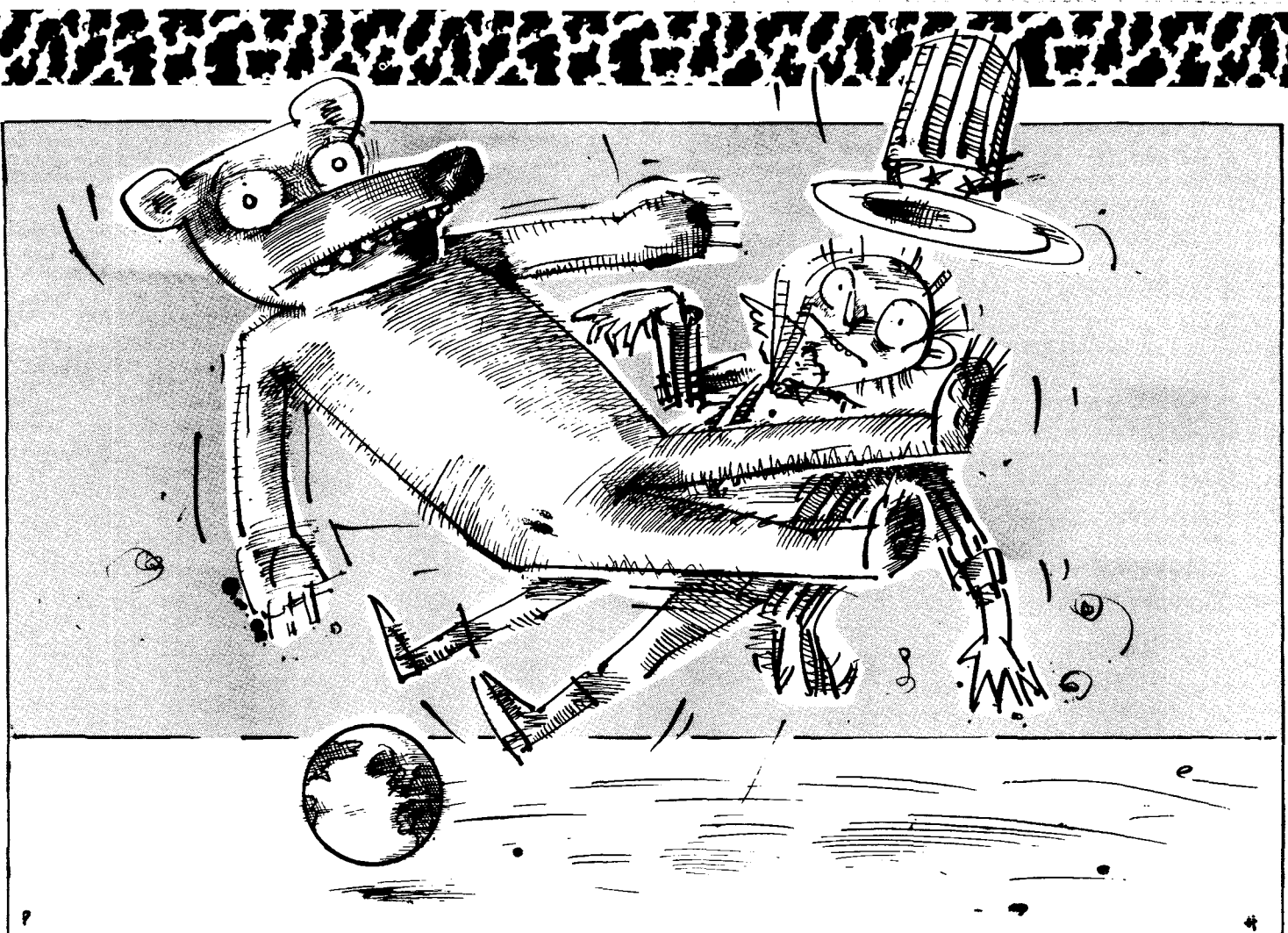
By decade's end, however, history was proving that the Soviets were definitely not its agents, and it was also getting sassy with the increasingly witless leaders of America. History ruthlessly cut the two empires down to size and obliged them to accept the reality that the other 150 or so countries on Earth were tired of riding the bench in the superpower game and were, on their own hook, making new rules and starting new leagues.

Grating expectations: Both Soviet and American expectations seem to have been undone mostly by incompetence, including the fatal mistake of believing their own propaganda. If it's any compensation to a declining America, the Soviets, in this writer's opinion, are guilty of having perpetrated the greater fraud on humanity.

The Soviet claim was to have given hope to the world's downtrodden by organizing a new, scientific and cooperative social order that made people happier. For reasons of modesty and discomfiture with prying eyes, they purported to be doing this in secret. To be a Communist, then, was to wait hopefully for some future surprise party at which the cornucopia of goodness finally spilled out across the horizon. The only other choice for those who still had faith in Soviet-style socialism was to face up to the possibility that the secrecy hid not progress, but backwardness so appalling that it could not be acknowledged.

Unspeakable backwardness was, in fact, the secret. The Soviet shame was not the hyperbole that they would lead humanity in new directions, but that while the First and even part of the Second World developed a broad common standard of modern life, they remained abysmally retrograde, with vast stretches of their country lacking even the appearance, let alone the substance, of humane existence. Schools without electricity, or running water, hospitals where the syringe was used over and over, grain rotting at railheads while stores had no bread, people whose lives were as much dominated by the basic fight for survival as those of people from the poorest parts of Earth—these were the commonplace realities of a nation that pretended to have answers for others.

Illusions about the rewards of capitalism



World upsets Soviets and U.S. in big tussle

have always been, perforce, personal, while illusions about the new dawn of socialism were supposed to be shared with the community. By their inability to succeed at bringing socialism up to the general living standard in the industrial world, the Soviets kicked communism in the ass and left what I hope is not the last laugh to the capitalists.

Self-delusion and decline: The American fraud was—and is—to keep on congratulating itself long after its distinctions had faded and others had stopped listening. The meaninglessness of the politicians' endless reiteration of the Barnum and Bailey bull that this is "the greatest country on Earth" becomes immediately apparent when some innocent asks the name of the second-greatest country on Earth. This stupid notion of America's innate superiority in all things has both contributed to the nation's decline and helped to mask it, soften it and thus make it more tolerable.

If the Soviets have the bigger Pinocchio noses about their system, they have at least—no doubt by sheer necessity—started to come clean with themselves and the world outside. The U.S., in far better shape on virtually all counts, still reckons it has the leisure of self-delusion, with a fallback position of pure stupidity. Here, the new predominance of the world over the superpowers is only barely realized. The cartoon notion that the world is there for the conquering or the saving remains much more comfortable for the time being than the evidence that the world invariably ends up having its way with those who mess with it.

It was, in fact, at the end of the '70s that the world began overriding the superpowers by shattering some of the Cold War myths by which the Soviets and Americans had granted themselves temporary license to lord it over history. For the U.S., the most idiotic but con-

venient of these pretenses was that Russians or Reds—words used loosely and interchangeably—were not simply rivals or enemies, but were the devils responsible for the tedious monster called history. Thus Ronald Reagan said in *U.S. News and World Report* on Dec. 15, 1980, that "the Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren't engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn't be any hot spots in the world." In other words, by putting the Soviets in their place, America could get back to ignoring the world while exploiting it.

Among the late-'70s events that exploded these myths and fatally undermined the Cold

Soviet and American expectations in the '80s seem to have been undone mostly by incompetence. Among other blunders, both superpowers have committed the fatal mistake of believing their own propaganda.

War were confrontations in Iran, Afghanistan and Indochina that didn't fit the ideological scheme of things.

Revolutions on the right: At a time when Western leftists were still looking to the Third World to sustain the romance of revolution that had faded in their own consumerist societies, the Iranians made themselves a splendid, bloody-flag uprising in which the poor poured into the streets to overwhelm by

their masses the crumbling armies of one of Washington's favorite *anciens regimes*. In triumphant glory, the people streamed to the airport—the modern equivalent of the Finland Station—to welcome their Lenin home from exile. Only their Lenin was a severe reactionary cleric who cared not a whit about social justice or economics ("the price of melons," as the Ayatollah put it), but wanted only to rescue his country from its despoilation by secular modernity and return it to the purity of feudal obscurantism.

At about the same time, Afghans rebelled against the ruthlessness of the modernizing policies of a pro-Soviet regime. The U.S., without a clue, at first opposed the Iranian and supported the Afghan rebellions, even though they both embodied the same anti-modern—be it capitalist or communist—tendencies.

Another disconcerting bit of history was the war in Indochina—not the inspiring 30-year struggle by which the doughty Vietnamese chased first haughty France, then the mighty U.S. out of their country, but the anomalous and dispiriting bloodletting since the late '70s in which the once-comradely Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries of China, Vietnam and Cambodia have used the weapons of 20th-century people's war to refight their ancient national rivalries for terrain and influence.

How could popular revolution, so feared by the right and idealized by the left, end up being reactionary? If socialist countries could have real shooting wars with each other, wasn't the basic Marxian notion of internationalism undone? Those were some of the questions for progressives.

For the U.S.-led right, there were fears rather than questions. The rise of fundamentalism in the religious world and nationalism in the secular one made the Cold War construct obsolete. America's enemy was no longer a Soviet communism that manipulated the world, but the world itself. And the world was a place about which we knew nothing and cared less. It was that dread subject called history.

There's no business: Without the Red Menace, America would have to deal with the world as a complexity of states, cultures, religions, economic challenges and ideas. That,

Continued on page 10

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INSHORT

By Joel Bleifuss

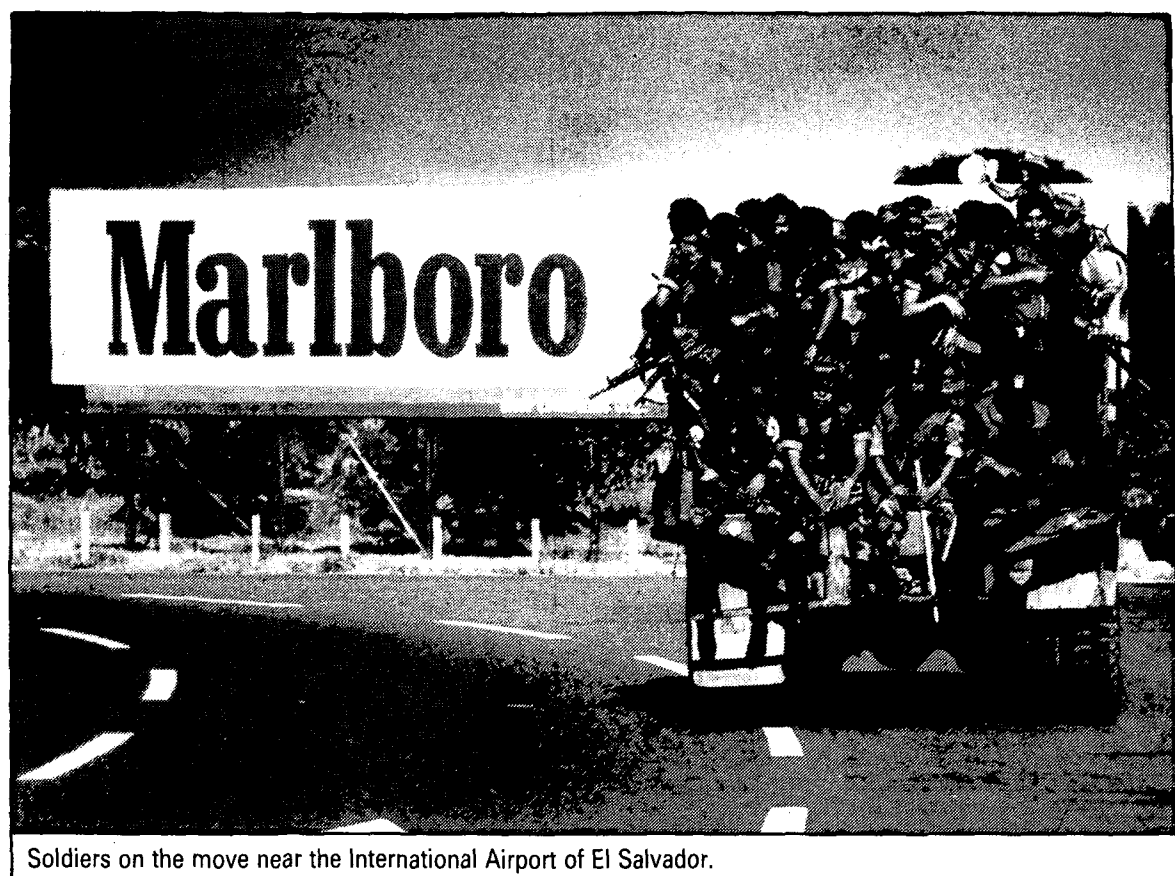
Decade of democracy decayed

The '80s will be remembered as a decade when substance was replaced by an image of substance. Take Richard Wirthlin, the man who boxed and packaged Ronald Reagan for the 1980 and 1984 elections. Recognizing his marketing savvy, in 1980 *Advertising Age* honored Wirthlin as "adman of the year." As he said at the time, "There is a tendency in our increasingly complex and highly technological society to forget that American democracy is less a form of government than a romantic preference for a particular value structure." And romantic preferences are easy to manipulate, especially in a population where many people let television do their thinking for them. In March 1985 Oliver North sent a memo to then-National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane titled "Timing and the Nicaraguan Resistance Vote." North, referring to Wirthlin's PR genius, described how the Reagan administration was attempting to swing the contra-aid vote in Congress by using polls to track public opinion and then adjusting administration statements to fit those attitudes.

Public diplomacy: The groundwork for this cynical strategy was laid in July 1983, when the White House established the State Department Office of Latin American Public Diplomacy (S/LPD). Its mission: to make the American public accept, if not support, the administration's Central American policy. According to a 1988 report by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, the S/LPD was staffed by "senior CIA officials with backgrounds in covert operations, as well as military intelligence and psychological operations specialists from the Department of Defense." An unnamed S/LPD official told the *Miami Herald* in July 1987, "If you look at it as a whole, the Office of Public Diplomacy [S/LPD] was carrying out a huge psychological operation, the kind the military conduct to influence the population in denied or enemy territory." Over the protests of the State Department, the S/LPD was put under the purview of Walt Raymond, the head of the National Security Council (NSC) Intelligence Directorate and a CIA propaganda expert with a background in covert operations. In August 1983 a group of PR specialists met with Raymond and the late CIA Director William Casey to discuss the S/LPD's mission. In a report on the meeting to then-NSC Adviser William Clarke, Raymond wrote, "[These experts] 'stated' what needed to be done to generate a nationwide campaign.... The overall purpose would be to sell a 'new product'—Central America—by generating interest across the spectrum." The S/LPD can take credit for the June 1986 vote in the House of Representatives that approved \$100 million in aid to the contras and granted the CIA permission to manage the proxy war. Public diplomacy administrator Otto Reich, in a letter asking that his office be officially commended for its success, boasted: "Despite the efforts of the formidable and well-established Soviet/Cuban/Nicaraguan propaganda apparatus, the achievements of U.S. public diplomacy are clearly visible."

Government by edict: To achieve its goals in Central America, the administration relied not only on domestic propaganda but also presidential edict. This was examined in a report titled *Government Secrecy—Decisions Without Democracy* that was released in December 1987 by the liberal advocacy group People for the American Way. According to author Steven L. Katz, the Reagan administration violated the democratic process "to advance secretly its policy goals, issuing hundreds of secret laws—secret even from Congress." The laws made by executive order were called during the Reagan years National Security Decisions Directives (NSDD). No one knows exactly how many edicts Reagan issued, but in his first seven years they numbered at least 280—about one every nine days. (In that same period he held 42 press conferences—about one every 60 days.) One of the Reagan edicts eventually exposed was a 1985 NSDD that gave permission to agencies other than the CIA to conduct covert operations—agencies like the NSC.

Terrorist mugs: Ed Meese's Justice Department was also working to ensure that the White House's contra rescue operation went smoothly. One such action was exposed in 1987 by former FBI agent Frank Varelli, who charged that when he was based in the FBI's Dallas office between 1981 and 1984 he helped compile an illustrated catalogue of terrorists. According to an FBI document Varelli obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, "[The FBI] has compiled over 1,000 photos of individuals known to have participated in leftist activities in El Salvador and the U.S.



Diabolic dominion

As the decade winds down, mainstream gurus herald communism's demise and celebrate the outbreak of "peace" across the globe—the former somehow propelling the latter, thus proving the excesses of the Reagan years finally triumphant. The great wise finger is even pointed south to Central America with the disbandment of the contras; open elections in Nicaragua, so open in fact that the U.S. is paying the handsome sum of \$12.5 million in an attempt to purloin victory for the opposition; a considerably calmed Guatemala; and a possible end to El Salvador's weary war.

Unfortunately, this same "peace" did not visit Orbelina Arguera on October 12. The Salvadoran national guard dumped her in an electrified bathtub and poured burning acid on her genitals. She is just one more victim of U.S. policies in Central America over the last 10 years, policies that have displaced more than 2 million people, produced some 150,000 corpses and encouraged the torture, rape and disappearance of countless others.

For the last 10 years the U.S. government has sponsored levels of terror in Central America with an ob-

sessiveness that is perverted even by its own historically deviant standards of foreign-policy behavior.

During this decade the U.S. has spent nearly \$2 billion deploying proxy armies against the region's impoverished inhabitants—a practice traditionally adopted by imperial powers bent on securing colonial subservience. It has maintained a crippling state of economic siege upon Nicaragua through its relentless embargo and its blocking of International Monetary Fund loans. It has fed the repressive military oligarchies of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras with seemingly limitless supplies of money and has defended these death-squad governments as "fledgling democracies."

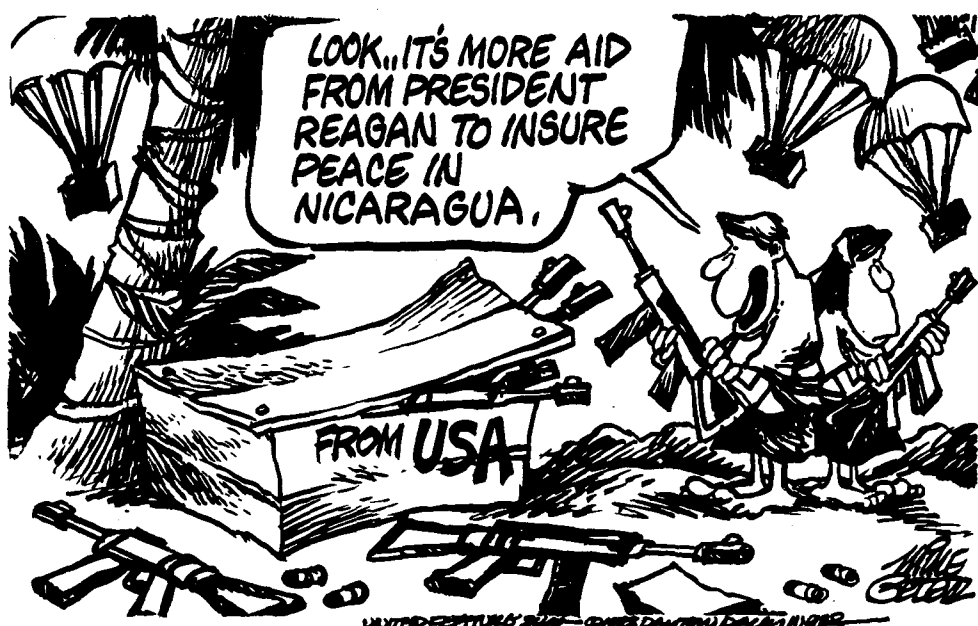
The U.S. has tried to subvert the only democratic election in the region and endorsed the fraudulent ones; violated international law; scoffed at a 14-to-1 World Court decision demanding reparations for the mining of Nicaragua's harbors; disseminated vast quantities of disinformation; and expended much energy exploiting, appropriating and attempting to destroy the regional peace plan proposed by President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica.

And then, of course, the U.S. sponsored the contras. Trained to elimi-

nate "soft targets," they ravaged Nicaragua's rural communities, destroyed schools and clinics and committed acts of unforgettable barbarism against many of the country's citizens. And the Iran-contra debacle demonstrated the Reagan administration's all-consuming determination to maintain this grotesque assault, which rendered 155,000 children homeless and 4,000 disabled.

In El Salvador, the U.S. has supported a counterinsurgency program that indiscriminately bombed peasants and ecologically decimated the countryside. U.S. aid to the various Salvadoran governments—currently estimated at \$1.5 million per day—has flowed virtually unabated, despite universal agreement that the unrelenting violence in El Salvador is primarily the work of government-linked death squads.

In Guatemala, Reagan backed the mass-murdering dictators of the early '80s, Lucas Garcia and then Gen. Rios Montt—noting their abysmal human-rights records only as they departed, and then merely to justify the unwavering support given to their successor. The bloodbath in Guatemala—including army massacres of entire villages—received scant media attention during



the last 10 years. The U.S. celebrated President Vinicio Cerezo's election, arguing that his civilian stripes evinced his "democratic" intention. But the bloodletting has persisted. All told, the U.S. has provided \$30 million to a ruthless military that still commands power, having "vanquished" more than one-third of all "disappeared" people in Latin America.

The world response to this unadmitted war has been shameful. The United Nations has remained pathetically indifferent. Western Europe has condoned U.S. behavior through sterile inaction, despite the occasional bout of "humanitarian" hic-

Coming of age in the '80s

It's like being strapped naked into a roller coaster as it inches toward an unseen precipice. Stripped of protective illusions that comforted my parents, I am approaching the brink of a century guaranteed to bring change of cataclysmic proportions. All I can do is hang on for the ride and remind myself that there is no shame in screaming.

To my parents, that seems overly pessimistic, the bleak view of a child grown world-weary before his time. I disagree; this is my time. And it is not weariness but anticipation that fills me as I look to the future. Whatever else happens, I have the satisfaction of knowing that the decades my generation will live through sure won't be boring.

We are the first generation to enter adulthood faced with undeniable evidence that the foundations of America's most cherished beliefs are shaken and crumbling. The reverberations, too large to measure now, will surface in our lifetimes in ways no one can predict.

How can you quantify the discovery that your country is no longer No. 1? Or how massive load debt will strain a population brought up believing theirs is the land of milk and honey? What will happen when the people of a nation grown used to calling the tune have to pay the piper?

I can't blame my parents for not understanding how I look to the future. They are children of the '50s. The worst bogeymen they were taught to fear were Communists and the Bomb. The children who came of age in the '80s got those lessons with their first Crayolas. After milk and cookies, we were introduced to a cast of bogeymen that left the Bomb begging for respect. Global warming. The disappearing ozone layer. Nuclear waste piling up. Toxins in every bite. Our parents blamed our listlessness on too many bowls of Froot Loops and not enough exercise.

We learned nice things in school, too. History class gave us lessons on representative democracy and the American tradition of world leadership. In science class we learned about elemental forces of the uni-

cups offered in the form of dimly small aid packages. The Soviet Union's sullen abandonment of the region's revolutionary movements is inexcusable.

The result of the U.S. government's unrelenting assault upon Central America is frightfully evident today. Costa Rica has become one more client state promoting U.S. interests in exchange for a cozy quantity of U.S. economic aid. Honduras, which in the '80s received \$400 million in U.S. military aid, has steadily grown into a U.S. armory in which right-wing death-squad activity has increased dramatically. In Nicaragua, one of history's most courage-

verse and how our nation's mastery of those forces led to America's technological superiority. Economics class centered on the evolution of American capitalism and how it provided a high standard of living for all.

I know my teachers meant well. But the curriculum tended to be like an armadillo: slow-moving and largely ignorant of the world around it. The world of the '80s, I found, was disturbingly dissimilar to the pictures in the textbooks.

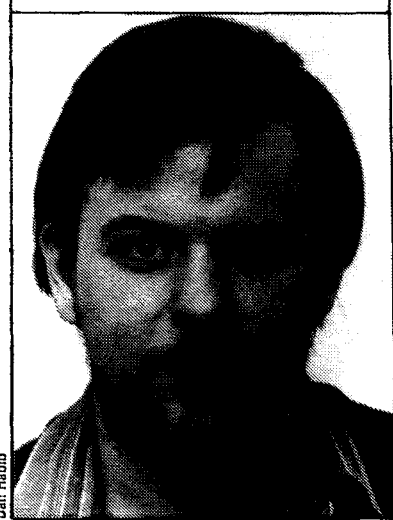
In 1983 I graduated from high school, and the U.S. invaded Grenada, a flyspeck island nation that no one ever heard of. This puzzled me.

In grade school I avidly read every book in the library about the American military, from the French and Indian Wars to Vietnam. There was plenty about invasions. But I couldn't reconcile the tales of brave men storming the beaches of Normandy with the stories from Grenada. A few dozen construction workers with rifles against an invasion fleet? This was new.

Saving Grenada apparently had something to do with restoring esprit de corps after hundreds of Marines had been blown up in a Beirut barracks by a car bomb. I learned later that a high school friend, who'd dropped out to join up, lost a leg in Beirut, while America saved face in Grenada.

Before Grenada, politics ranked up there with calculus on my list of things best left to others. But news of the invasion was accompanied by another disturbing picture—an aging ex-actor named Ronald Reagan enthusiastically telling the

Andrew Galarneau



ous and promising popular revolutions has been throttled, and the country lies in the desperate throes of socioeconomic asphyxiation.

Amid this devastation, the U.S. has decided to declare peace. It is a familiar story stretching all the way back to the murderous Romans. We should remember the words that the Scottish general Calgacus delivered to his troops before they met their end against the Romans at Graupian Hill in 84 A.D.: "To plunder, butcher, steal, these things they misname empire; they make a desolation, and they call it peace."

—Rich McKerrow, a British journalist who writes on political issues.

cameras what a splendid victory this was for democracy.

Ah, democracy. So that's what my teachers were making such a fuss over. I was too young to vote and I was already wondering if I should bother.

Eventually I did vote, when I got a chance. But most people my age still think politics is better left to others. I've had dozens of discussions on the subject. They all end the same way. My friends ask, "What difference does it make?" And I cannot find an answer that satisfies them.

Watergate, the political scandal for the previous generation, ended in the resignation of President Richard Nixon. The congressional investigation of our generation probed the Iran-contra affair. It produced reams of evidence implicating the president, vice president, attorney general and other top government officials in crimes far worse than Watergate.

The result? Oliver North became a hero, the vice president became president and the nation turned back to its soap operas. Nixon, rehabilitated, returned to the front pages. It's discouraging. Try to get people to look up from their beer and care about politics after that.

More Americans ignored the last election than voted for president. What can reverse that trend? What happens to democracy when it becomes an instrument of the minority? We shall see.

My generation will find the answers to many questions in the years to come, but not because we asked. The decisions will be forced upon us by default. Sooner or later, there will be too many homeless people, too many highways and bridges crumbling under decades of neglect, too many industries bankrupt or bought by the Japanese. Sooner or later, the bill for this last decade will come due.

That's what makes the future so exciting. The problems we face have begun to reveal themselves, but the answers remain hidden. It will be up to us—the unprepared, ill-equipped, uncaring children of the '80s—to shoulder the burden or collapse. Either way, it's going to be a hell of a show.

—Andrew Galarneau, a reporter for the Concord (N.H.) Monitor

[The] Dallas [field office] will periodically supply pertinent photos and background to the bureau ... for inclusion into the Terrorist Photograph Album." All told, between 1981 and 1985, 52 of the FBI's 58 field offices investigated more than 138 domestic political organizations at the NSC's request.

Mole on Hill: Even Congress was infiltrated. In spring 1986, as contra aid was coming up for a vote, the Senate subcommittee on terrorism, narcotics and international operations was embroiled in its investigation of charges that the contras were running guns and smuggling drugs. The key figure in that investigation was Oliver North's man in Costa Rica—rancher John Hull. The Justice Department kept tabs on this inquiry through Richard Messick, at the time a senior aide on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Described by one deputy assistant attorney general as "our spy on the committee," Messick allegedly tried to waylay the Kerry investigation by using Justice Department-designed misinformation both to discredit witnesses and to convince Republican committeemen that the drug-smuggling charges were baseless. The Justice Department was also reported to have instructed Messick to "dig up any derogatory information" about the personal life of subcommittee chairman John Kerry (D-MA).



Head in hole: Not that Congress was interested. This past summer the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings to determine whether former Bush aide and CIA/NSC veteran Donald Gregg would make an acceptable ambassador to Korea. Gregg claimed that neither he nor George Bush were involved in arming the contras at a time when such efforts were illegal. He told the committee that North must have made a mistake when he wrote in his notebook that Gregg and he had discussed contra resupply at a Sept. 10, 1985, meeting. The Democrat-controlled committee was not in a fighting mood and approved Gregg as ambassador. One of his Democratic votes came from Dixiecrat Sen. Terry Sanford (D-NC), who explained his vote this way: "If Gregg was lying, he was lying to protect the president, which is different from lying to protect himself. ... My own view is to leave [Iran-contra] to history to find out the true facts."

Conflict of interest? After three years of scandal, Congress appears ready to give up the fight. Yet the Bush administration could still encounter Iran-contra troubles in federal court. Don't hold your breath. The administration is holding the evidence and wants to keep things that way. In December 1988, for example, six Reagan administration officials, including Attorney General William Thornburgh, met and decided not to release classified documents to the independent counsel, Lawrence Walsh, who was prosecuting five former Reagan administration officials for Iran-contra misdeeds. Thornburgh et al. justified withholding the evidence by citing national security concerns. As the *New York Times*' Linda Greenhouse observed at the time, "The administration's stance was inherently suspect for the obvious reason that both the departing president and the incoming one had nothing to gain from a trial that threatened to dissect a mortifying foreign policy debacle."

Kinder and more gently managed: In a post-election press conference, Bush was asked how he was going to "communicate with the American people." He answered in part: "I will continue ... what I've been doing as vice president, being briefed directly by the Central Intelligence Agency every single day. It's a little bit of a departure, but that's the way I'm going to do it, and it puts me in contact with the experts." But not the people—and that's a problem. As *Washington Post*'s Lou Cannon wrote, "Bush is restricting the access for the press severely and is starting out where it took Reagan several years to get to." Or as UPI's Helen Thomas put it, "Bush will tear all of the pages from Reagan's book, and it will be total news management."

By Salim Muwakkil

A BLACK-ORIENTED RADIO STATION IN Chicago advertises itself as containing no heavy beat and, emphatically, "no rap." The station, which previously featured a wide range of popular dance music, has adopted a new music concentrating on ballads and softer mid-tempo selections. By proudly disclaiming rap—the raw, percussive music created primarily by the African-American underclass—the station's program director is seeking to capitalize on what is presumably a widespread distaste for the musical style among blacks with higher demographic profiles.

The logic underlying this marketing ploy reveals an important dimension of African-American life in the '80s: increased class

BLACK AMERICA

polarization. In years past, black-oriented radio trumpeted its connection to the street; the extent of that link, in fact, measured a station's cultural authenticity. African-Americans of all classes found entertainment and a sense of cultural solidarity at a particular spot on the radio dial. But as the '80s draw to a close, the street sensibilities that once were heralded as marks of distinction are being bitterly rejected. No rap, indeed.

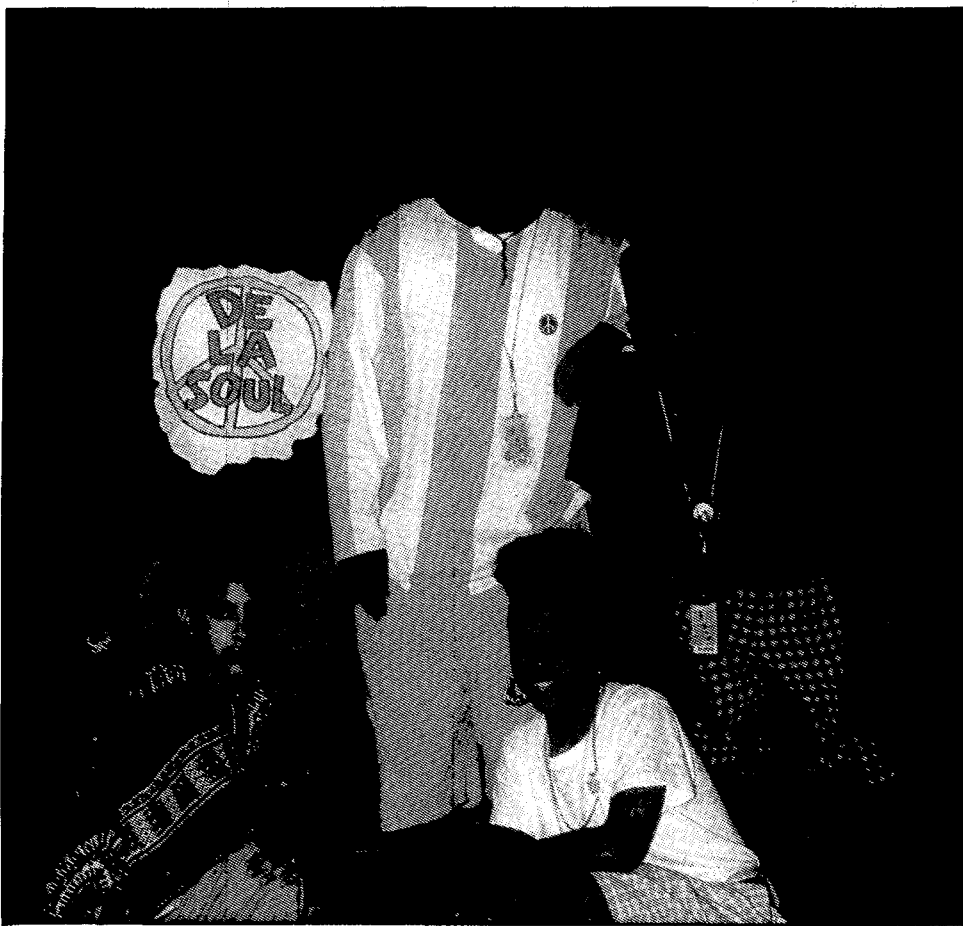
And there's more going on here than just musical preferences. The rap gap simply reflects a growing divide within the African-American community. The income difference and social distance between middle-class blacks and the one-third of black Americans classified as poor is larger now than ever before in this country's post-slavery history. According to U.S. Census Bureau figures, the top one-fifth of black families received 47 percent of the total black income in 1986, while the lowest fifth received only 3.4 percent.

Social isolation: The success of the civil rights movement in breaking down some barriers of racial segregation allowed many middle- and working-class blacks to leave their inner-city neighborhoods for greener pastures. But their exodus, combined with larger economic changes in society at large, has resulted in a greater concentration of poverty in the communities they left behind.

In an article from a soon-to-be-published volume titled *Welfare Policy for the 1990s*, Loic J.D. Wacquant and William Julius Wilson write that "the increasing concentration of poverty, joblessness and welfare receipt ... as well as the bleeding of industrial jobs on which the urban poor have traditionally relied most ... indicates not only that life conditions have dramatically worsened in the ghettos of the country's large metropolises, but also that these racial enclaves now harbor unprecedented concentrations of the most underprivileged segments of the urban poor."

What's more, Wacquant and Wilson write, the social isolation brought on by this class transformation has left the urban poor much more isolated and vulnerable to the kind of prolonged joblessness that has plagued inner-city communities in the '70s and early '80s as a result of uneven economic growth and periodic recessions. "The absence of stable working families makes it considerably more difficult to sustain basic institutions in the inner city, for it cuts deep into their membership and saps their base of support: banks, stores, professional services and

Increased polarization: aesthetics or economics?



Rap group De La Soul exemplifies the new black aesthetic.

restaurants lose their best and most regular patrons; recreational facilities, block clubs, community groups and other informal organizations also fail to retain their most likely users."

This new stratification also is apparent in the growing cultural animosities between the classes. The zeal with which many black middle-classes denounce rap music is largely a function of those class antipathies. The aggressive bombast that characterizes much of rap is culled from an inner-city sensibility that ghetto expatriates would prefer to forget. Those who champion the music, however, argue that the middle class' aversion to it is merely another example of

The zeal with which many middle-class blacks denounce rap music is largely a function of class antipathies.

blacks' assimilationist—"siddity"—attitude and lack of regard for their own cultural products.

Michael Dyson, a writer and professor of theology at the Chicago Theological Seminary, says rap music represents a generational shift in aesthetic sensibilities, even as it "testifies to the intraracial class divisions in African-American communities for the last 30 years." Dyson argues that rap music "captures the social isolation, economic desperation and poetical degradation and other terms of the underclass existence."

Politics of class: Concurrent with the class transformation of the inner city and the growth of the urban poor—and 82 per-

cent of the African-American population now lives in urban areas—has been the spectacular increase in black political representation. Before the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, there were fewer than 500 black elected officials nationwide; now there are approximately 7,000, including more than 300 mayors. But those numbers represent only about 1.5 percent of all elected officials in the nation, while the African-American population comprises at least 12 percent. Despite that gross imbalance, increases in black political power have slowed considerably during the last years of the '80s, since most predominantly black political jurisdictions already have elected African-American leadership.

Although black organizers have seldom wavered in their quest for political empowerment, many are beginning to question the quality of the leadership brought to the fore by the electoral activity of the last 20 years. There is a serious crisis in black politics in the post-civil rights era, argues Susan Anderson in the October 16 edition of *The Nation*. This crisis, she writes, "is based on the widening chasm between the ambitions of black officeholders and the needs of their urban constituents, particularly the poor."

Anderson is voicing a complaint heard with much greater frequency these days as organizers and analysts confront the sobering reality that black politicians have done little to stem the rise and concentration of poverty within the inner cities. Increasingly, black elected officials are being criticized for their middle-class orientation and apparent lack of attention to the horrid conditions that afflict so many of their less-fortunate constituents. Additionally, many activists have grown wary of reflexively supporting black politicians charged with various levels of corruption.

"After a while, that 'white conspiracy' excuse begins to wear a little thin," explains Said Muhammad, a New York community organizer. "Although I know that there is often some validity in that excuse, a lot of black politicians are a little too eager to use it. Sometimes they are corrupt, and we should be mature enough to hold their feet to the fire and not always rush to their defense."

The charge that black elected officials are too estranged from the concerns of the African-American underclass is likely to become more insistent as a new crop of crossover politicians begins campaigning to attract white votes. "If there is a black political crisis, it is to be found in the conflict between continued inequality for the black poor and traditional black political concerns," writes Anderson.

But some analysts are not unhappy about the prospect of crossover politics. Martin Kilson, professor of political science at Harvard University and a widely published analyst of African-American affairs, enthusiastically urges black politicians to adopt the crossover strategy; he calls it the "transethnic imperative."

In an essay published in the fall 1989 issue of *Dissent*, Kilson writes, "The initial focus of an emergent black transethnic politics must be to transform black elected officials into politicians elected by multi-ethnic votes, not simply black votes." Embracing this imperative allows "the transethnic politician to do several rather difficult things: allay the anxieties of middle-class whites ... attract funds and volunteers from affluent white voters; and simultaneously appear loyal to, or at least not fickle about, black policy concerns."

New black aesthetic: But it is precisely that type of political posturing that has alienated many black organizers from the electoral arena. Politicians who affect positions merely to accommodate the status quo have worn out their welcomes with the new breed of movement activist. And if Kilson's "transethnic imperative" is the wave of the future, the alliance between grass-roots organizers and black office-seekers that has marked the last decade is nearing an end. "If there is to be a renewal of black politics," writes Anderson, "it will depend upon the ability of leaders to embrace the cause of the poor, and in so doing, challenge the economic order, which creates poverty as it amasses wealth."

The dawning sensibility among blacks that is provoking such displeasure with politics as usual is also discernible in other spheres of activity in the black community. For example, young African-American artists are hailing a "new black aesthetic" that rudely disassembles current cultural protocol. Practitioners of this new aesthetic take black culture for granted and are playfully iconoclastic about the somber poses of '60s black nationalism, the old black aesthetic. Yet they are very serious about rendering the particularity of the African-American experience. Perhaps they could be correctly termed "post-nationalists."

Some leading lights in this incipient movement are filmmakers Spike Lee, Keenan Wayans and Reginald and Warrington Hudlin; musicians Branford Marsalis, George Clinton, Joan Armatrading, Steve Coleman and Vernon Reid of the group Living Colour; rap groups De La Soul and Digital Under-

Continued on page 22

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

THE WASHINGTON OF THE '80S MIGHT WELL be remembered for Ronald Reagan's presidency, but the real story lies four blocks from the White House, where K Street runs through downtown Washington. During the '80s, the center of political power shifted dramatically from Congress and the White House to lawyers, lobbyists, public-relations flacks and policy experts, many of whom work at offices on or near K Street.

The key legislation of the last 15 years was either written or unwritten on K Street. Former Nixon administration Treasury official Charls Walker, who formed the American Council for Capital Formation, was largely responsible for the details of the 1978 and 1981 tax cuts. The current proposal to reduce the capital gains tax was developed by 24 business lobbyists who meet each month at the law firm of Steptoe and Johnson to discuss what they call "deforming the tax code." Almost every move in trade negotiations between the U.S. and Japan was dictated by Japan's ubiquitous Washington lobby.

Even diplomacy is shaped on K Street. In 1985 the high-powered lobbying firm of Black, Manafort, Stone and Kelly, inspired by a \$600,000 advance, transformed UNITA's Jonas Savimbi from a South African puppet to a conservative cult hero and client of the U.S. government. In 1987-88 a team of lobbyists hired by the Toshiba company beat back congressional efforts to impose severe sanctions on the company for selling advanced anti-submarine technology to the Soviet Union. The lobbyists did such a good job that the vehemently anti-communist Reagan administration, which had campaigned vigorously against technology transfers to the Soviet Union, threatened to veto the congressional sanctions.

The denizens of K Street constitute a new mandarin class in America. Unlike the Chinese bureaucrats of old, however, the lawyer-lobbyist-pollsters of K Street are beholden not to a higher wisdom but to the highest bidder.

Tax relief for millionaires: Although the '80s were its time of greatest growth, K Street began to expand from a narrow enclave to an alternative center of governmental power in the early '70s. During the Nixon and Ford presidencies government involvement in business expanded dramatically. The White House, pressured by Congress and militant public-interest movements, created the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Congress increased its own power over the economy by creating the Congressional Budget Office and by reorganizing the budget process.

Business responded by increasing its presence in Washington. In 1968, only 100 corporations had offices in Washington. By 1978, 500 had offices; by 1986, there were 1,300. Between 1960 and 1986, the number of trade associations went from 1,100 to 3,500. These corporations and trade associations not only hired staff (80,000 people now work for trade associations alone) but also employed K Street law and public-relations firms. And they financed political organizations like the Business Roundtable and think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute to represent their interests.

By the late '70s, as David Vogel documents

K Street's rise to power of special interest to U.S.

in *Fluctuating Fortunes*, this growing business lobby had vanquished the public-interest movement. It transformed Carter's tax reform bill into what the administration described as "tax relief for millionaires," and it defeated a new consumer protection act and labor law reform.

The business lobby continues to be extremely powerful in Washington—a power exercised most recently in blocking regulation of Wall Street and of corporate takeovers. When the Democratic-controlled Congress tried to force Eastern Airlines Chairman Frank Lorenzo to negotiate with his

WASHINGTON

striking unions, it ran up against a network of Lorenzo lawyer-lobbyists on K Street. Lorenzo could call on former Democratic chairman Robert Strauss, Democratic fundraiser J.D. Williams and Tommy Boggs, the son of former Democratic Reps. Hale and Lindy Boggs and a senior partner in the law firm of Patton, Boggs & Blow.

Hiring Guccis: During the Carter and Reagan years, the federal government also increased its role in trade conflicts, which led to a new wave of expansion on K Street. Until the early '70s, American trade policy had consisted largely of negotiating changes in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, but in 1971 the U.S. suffered its first trade deficit in the 20th century. In response, President Nixon slapped a surcharge on imports and placed limitations on textile imports. Over the next two decades, American companies increasingly clamored for relief from foreign dumping in U.S. markets and foreign restrictions upon American imports.

American companies hired trade lobbyists, but more importantly, foreign firms and governments fought back by hiring their own Washington lobbyists and public-relations experts. Japan led the way. Instead of operating primarily through its own embassy, Japan hired \$350-an-hour lawyers and public-relations experts—known as "Guccis" for their fancy imported footwear. According to TRW Vice President Pat Choate, who is writing a book on foreign lobbying, the Japanese alone spent \$150 million on lobbying in 1988, more than all the American business lobbies combined.

Former government officials who 25 years ago might have gone to Wall Street or to private corporations stayed on K Street to work for foreign firms. The Japanese alone have hired about 125 former government officials. These include two of the last three special trade representatives—the third, Clayton Yeutter, is still in office as the secretary of agriculture—three of the last four Democratic National Committee chairmen, and the last two Republican chairs. Ron Brown, the current Democratic chairman, is a former lobbyist for Japanese firms and still belongs to Patton, Boggs & Blow, which represents Japanese firms.

Following the example of American business, foreign governments and firms also heavily funded Washington think tanks and policy organizations whose views they found congenial. The Japanese fund every sizable think tank in Washington, from the moderate Brookings Institution to the conservative Center for Strategic and International Studies. The South Koreans and Taiwanese are major contributors to the conservative Heritage Foundation. And the West German Marshall Fund provided the bulk of early funds for the Institute for International Economics, a key group opposing trade legislation. The only exceptions are the smaller pro-labor Economic Policy Institute and the new-right Free Congress Foundation, both of which have criticized Japanese trade practices.

By creating a network of lobbyists and policy experts, foreign firms have been able to influence legislation. In the early '80s, the Japanese lobby blocked the United Auto Workers' domestic-content legislation, which would have required that cars sold in the U.S. be made primarily with American parts. In the mid-'80s, the same lobby blocked action against Japan for dumping semiconductor chips until six American manufacturers were driven out of business and the Japanese controlled the world market. Now the same lobby, armed with sophisticated and expensive studies, has successfully fought government funding for high-definition television.

Foreign firms have also been able to use K Street to shape the national debate. Since most politicians and voters don't understand the complexities of trade issues, they rely on established authorities. By hiring most of

the former officials concerned with trade and economic policy, the Japanese have acquired a monopoly of such authorities. For instance, if they need an op-ed piece opposing controls on foreign investment, they can call on Hitachi lobbyist and former Republican Cabinet official Elliot Richardson. If they want someone to intervene in the Democratic Party debate, they can rely on Strauss or former Carter administration domestic-policy chief and Hitachi lobbyist Stuart Eizenstat.

Defeating Washington: K Street has few challengers in Washington. Politicians and government officials are loath to defy it because the top K Street lawyers are important to a politician's ability to raise campaign funds and to a government official's dreams of getting a lucrative private-sector job. One lobbyist for a domestic manufacturer, who asked not to be identified, explained, "If you're a Democrat and favor some kind of trade protection, you run up against [former Democratic Party chairman] Chuck Mannatt, Bob Strauss and Ron Brown. If you're interested in your career, why bump against these powerhouses?"

The national press, although quick to expose sex scandals and petty corruption in government agencies, has been slow to take on K Street. Lobbyists for foreign firms often appear on television or are quoted as objective experts in the press without revealing that they have a vested interest in the opinions they express.

One blatant example of this collusion occurred during the semiconductor controversy in 1986. In October, the *Washington Post* ran an article headlined, "Former U.S. Official Assails Japanese Pact." It reported that former Commerce Department Undersecretary Lionel Olmer had criticized the Reagan administration's semiconductor agreement with Japan in a debate with lawyer Alan Wolff. The article identified Wolff as a lobbyist for American semiconductor producers, but failed to note that he had been the deputy U.S. trade representative in the Carter administration. It identified Olmer as a former Commerce Department official but failed to identify him as having become a consultant to Nippon Telephone and Telegraph.

The national press also reinforces the lobby's efforts to discredit any politicians who challenge its sway. The press rarely forgoes a chance to beat up on House Majority Leader and lobby critic Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-MO). After the House passed the Bush administration's capital gains bill, the *New York Times* published a far-fetched report, based on selective sources, that Democrats were blaming the defeat on Gephardt's class-conscious rhetoric that "pitted the limousine set against the middle class."

The only way to defeat K Street is from the outside—by mobilizing the millions of Americans who would be outraged to learn that their government is being run by lobbyists for American and foreign firms. An anti-K Street campaign could potentially unite labor leaders and new-right conservatives, Southerners and Northerners, blue-collar Democrats and Chamber of Commerce Republicans. Such a campaign could define the politics of the '90s.

But K Street, with its links to politicians and the press, promises to remain a formidable opponent.

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Unlike the mandarins of old, the lawyer-lobbyist-pollsters of K Street are beholden not to a higher wisdom but to the highest bidder.

By David Moberg

THE AMERICAN ECONOMY HAS BEEN "MANAGED toward economic decline" because business executives run their companies for short-term profit rather than long-term strength, two Harvard Business School professors argued in a controversial 1980 essay. Such short-range thinking, coupled with a blinkered vision of its accumulating costs, has been the hallmark of the past decade for American business as well as for political leaders, especially Ronald Reagan's anti-government, free-market, feed-the-rich crew.

As a result, the '80s may be remembered as the Deficit Decade, less because of the much-ballyhooed and equally misunderstood federal budget deficits than because of a deficit in strategic leadership—moral and political as much as economic. The decade's accumulated debts and the exhaustion or misuse of social, ecological and economic capital will burden generations to come.

This pattern reappears in different areas, with cumulatively disastrous effects. After the 1973 OPEC crisis briefly awakened American political and business leaders to the fundamental problems of accelerating fossil-fuel consumption, the return of low oil prices lulled them back to sleep. By the end of the decade the threat of global warming from the greenhouse effect again demonstrated the urgent need for a new energy strategy. And despite at least two decades of warnings, the nation continued to defer solutions to the growing problems of waste—radioactive byproducts of nuclear power and weapons plants, toxic chemicals, air pollutants causing toxic rain, and mountains of mummified urban garbage. Only toward the end of the decade was it seriously recognized that the vaunted U.S. agricultural industry was unsustainable—polluting the environment, rapidly destroying the nation's once-rich soil, endangering consumers, farmers and wildlife and relying far too heavily on non-renewable sources of energy and fertility. The bottom line of the balance sheet with nature was red, and the deficit was growing.

Upward redistribution: But an equally grave human and social deficit from the '80s is most strikingly indicated by the growing inequality in income and wealth. Between 1979 and 1988, according to an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau figures by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the richest fifth of U.S. families gained 12 percent in income, the next richest 5.7 percent, and the middle only 1.3 percent, while the bottom two-fifths actually lost 2.1 percent and 6.1 percent, respectively, of their income. And the poorest age group now is children—one-fifth of all children and nearly half of all black children live in poverty.

Combined with a renewed racism, or at least an indifference to blacks by many whites, this poverty and inequality create a deficit of hope and of opportunity for nearly half the country. This intensifies a seething mass of urban social problems—crime, drug abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, child neglect—that will be far more costly and difficult to reverse than they would have been to prevent.

And it's not just the poor who are hard hit. The share of income going to the middle three-fifths of the population is the lowest ever recorded. The squeeze is particularly harsh for younger families whose parents can't bankroll education or a down payment

Short-term view yields grave social deficits

on a home. Lower incomes are not the only hardships. The educational system is either failing or closed to most young people. The health care system is spiraling into chaos—with growing numbers of people not covered by insurance, with costs rising and with the entire system strained by AIDS (long ignored by the Reagan administration), the needs of the aged and its own irrationality. At unsafe workplaces the hazards and costly damage increase—both to afflicted individuals and to society, in lost productivity and higher health costs.

These ecological and social deficits add to the familiar economic deficits. In addition

ECONOMY

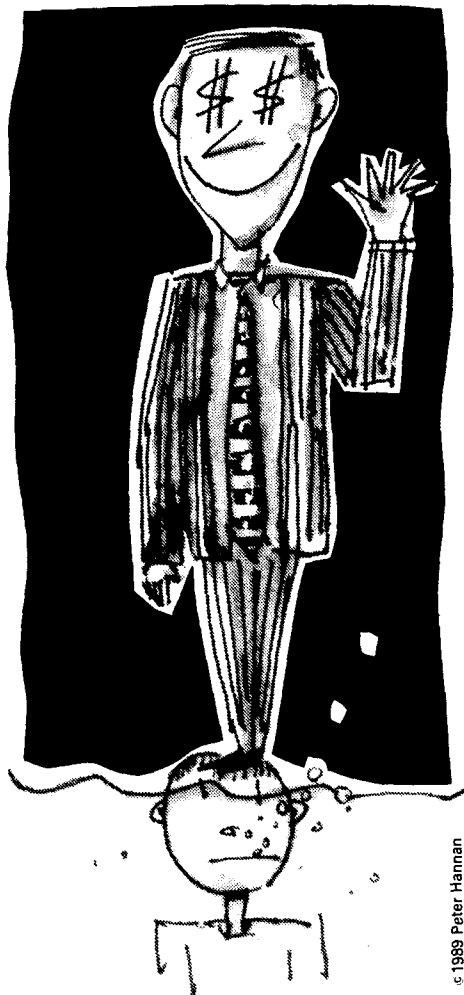
to the suffering they bring, they deplete or fail to develop natural and human "capital" and create costly problems that are a drag on the economy.

Failures of the financial system in the '80s—savings and loans, banks, the farm credit system—will saddle the future with huge debts. And despite wishful thinking in the mid-'80s, the Third World debt crisis remains an unresolved, debilitating curse on those poor countries and a threat to the world economy. The ballooning corporate debt, driven largely by the takeover craze, makes corporations and the banks that loaned to them far more vulnerable to the next inevitable downturn in the economic cycle.

As with the federal deficit, the worst aspect of this corporate debt is that it is being used to fuel speculative fires rather than for long-term productive improvements. If the federal budget deficit had been incurred for infrastructure—instead of there being a sharp, steady decline in spending on roads, waterworks, low-income housing, urban mass transit and other public systems—or education, job training, and basic research instead of for the arms buildup, it might be paying off now by improving domestic competitiveness, thus helping reduce the trade deficit.

Overrated "overconsumption": A growing chorus of conservative as well as liberal voices—including such figures as former

Since markets don't take into account "externalities" to each firm's balance sheet, businesses whose decisions cause ecological damage, inflict human casualties and disrupt society are able to shift these costs to the individual, the government or the environment.



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Secretary of Commerce Peter G. Peterson and Harvard economist Benjamin Friedman—says that "we" have been consuming too much in the '80s. But most of "us" haven't: our incomes have stagnated or declined. American University economist Robert Blecker argues that average real-consumption growth has not been unusually fast in the '80s. Consumption has seemed high relative to national income not because of "a generalized outburst of hedonism," he said, but primarily because of an export-growth decline responsible for much of the trade deficit and because of increased spending by the wealthy who gained income. But many economists now argue for generalized austerity—which would force those who have already paid for the decade-long party by the rich to pay for it once again.

Such austerity and its depressing effects would threaten the world economy. Instead, global economic health requires income redistribution within industrialized countries as well as from rich to poor countries. This would increase worldwide demand so that the U.S. market is not expected to absorb the world's exports by itself.

The economic failings have two roots: shortcomings of government—both the private government of corporations and the corporate-dominated public government—and excessive reliance on the market. At a time when the centrally planned Communist-bloc economies are turning to the market and Reagan's America enjoys a long-term boom with high job growth (mainly low-wage jobs, of course), attacking the market might seem perverse. But despite its ability to unleash some people's initiatives (while suppressing those of others), its flexibility, and its competitive mechanisms of incentive and efficiency, the free market

even at its best is a limited tool. Without a strong countervailing governmental and cultural framework, the market gives growing priority to short-term results. And as the most free-market-oriented of the major industrial economies, the U.S. suffers most from this effect.

Since markets don't take into account "externalities" to each firm's own balance sheet, businesses whose decisions cause ecological damage, inflict human casualties and disrupt society are able to shift these costs elsewhere—to the individual, the government or the environment. And even though better education, more research, good working conditions (high pay, job training and job security) and classic public works may improve overall business profit and productivity—not to mention social welfare—such policies often do not reward individual businesses. And with business becoming more global, it recognizes even less any responsibility to its national base.

The market can self-destruct as well. Speculation—gambling on financial manipulations—is a part of all markets. But as boom times continue, as financial transactions become quicker, easier and more detached from production of goods and services, and as long-range productive investments seem less rewarding than quick-buck schemes, speculation grows. American industrial capitalism is increasingly being overshadowed by financial capitalism, but unlike Germany or Japan, where investment bankers often help corporations plan for the long haul and government is more likely to demand some social accountability, the U.S. system encourages a shorter-term, more irresponsible perspective.

Speculative casinos: Originally corporations were allowed to issue stock as a way of raising large amounts of capital for major projects while allowing individual investors to keep their own money liquid, recounts Columbia University professor Louis Lowenstein. But now the stock markets—and even more so the markets in instruments such as stock index futures—have become speculative casinos, where large blocks of stock change hands frequently. With short-term commitments, such shareholders are hardly the real "owners" of the business in any traditional sense. And many managers, looking only to maximize their stock options over a few years, have less actual long-term commitment to a business than do their employees, who may have little or no voice, especially with the decline in unionization. Corporate control is now increasingly determined in the speculative frenzy of real or potential takeovers, forcing even shorter-range action: slashing research, selling off assets, firing employees to pay debt.

To redress these ills and prevent more deficit decades, corporations must be chartered with more explicit social responsibilities, as well as more democratic control that allows workers and communities a direct voice in corporate operations. The government must provide a framework of long-term public investments and of regulation to dampen speculation, to enforce social and ecological responsibility and to democratize economic decisions. Otherwise, the market is likely to become destructive to its environment as well as to itself.

Of all the deficits of this decade, however, the greatest is the deficit of political will to make these changes. The future costs of that political failure will be great indeed. □

By Kevin Kelly

DALLAS

AS THE '80S DRAW TO A CLOSE, BUSINESS analysts across the nation bemoan the collapse of American ingenuity. Maybe they aren't looking in the right places.

Move over Japan, because greeting-card maker Ross Bennett says we're not washed up yet. In late June Bennett cashed in on faxmania by introducing a line of faxable greeting cards. The 8½-by-11-inch sheets feature artwork and messages tackling subjects from birthdays to receivables. "Your bill is due/Here's cost and tax/Please pay by check/And not by fax."

An extraordinary decade, these '80s. America became a service society, writing rhymes

BUSINESS

and working at McDonald's. The stock market transmogrified into a casino. The nation's savings and loans became playthings for financial wildcatters who cost us \$200 billion. Labor retreated, the personal computer flourished and business embraced debt with abandon.

The economy changed our language, as businesspeople invented words and titles for a new world. To name a few: corporate raider, leverage, fax, frequent-flyer mile, spin, synergies, junk bond, personal computer, globalization, electronic mail. Let's not forget mommy track, yuppie, gender gap, financial services, corporate restructuring and user-friendly.

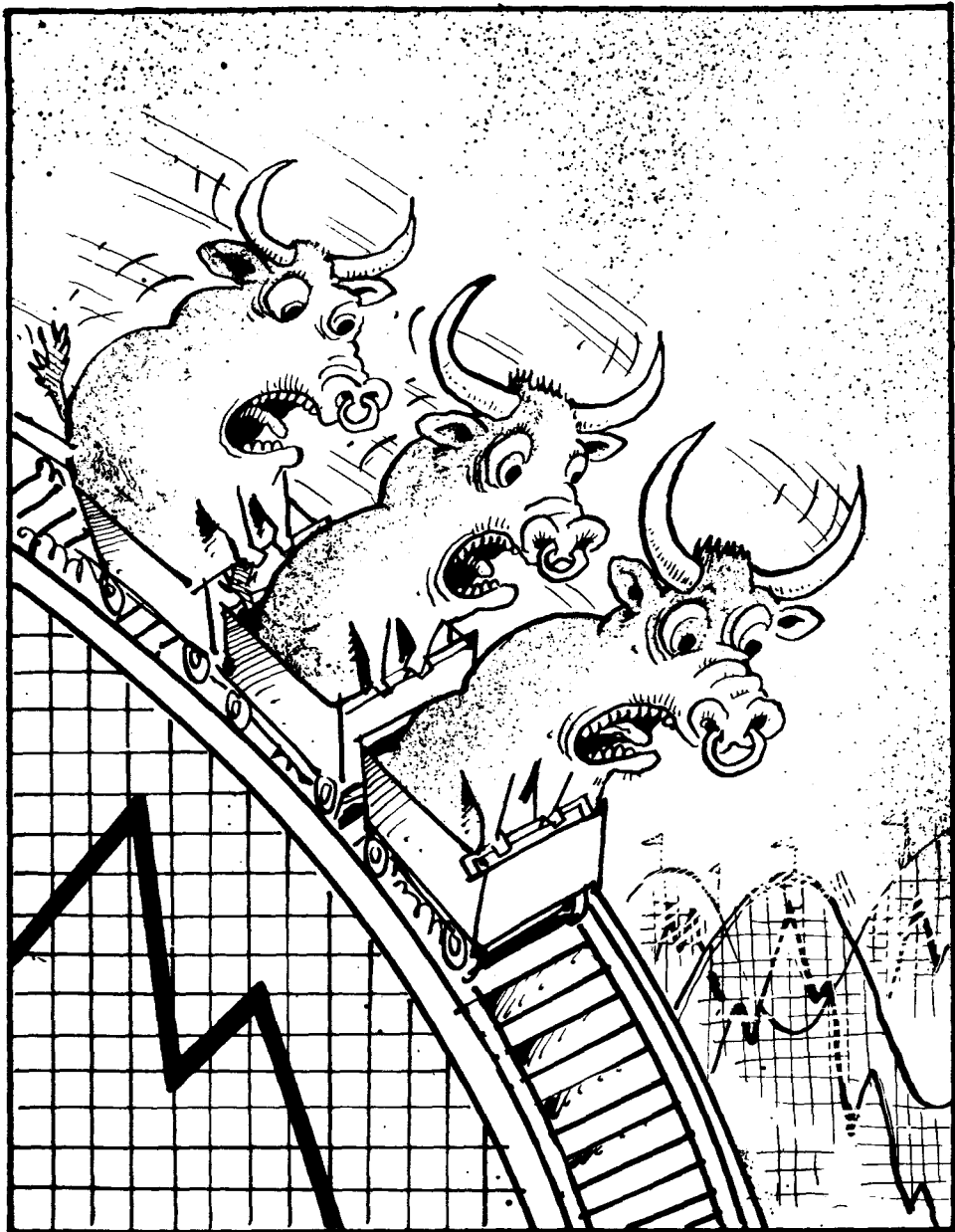
The magnitude of economic change also required a new perspective. A 190-point fall in the skyrocketing Dow Jones average became a "correction," not a "crash." In 1981 when the economy collapsed into a cycle of high unemployment, it was only a "recession," not a "depression." As the decade closes, growing anti-Asian sentiment in business circles is dubbed the "new thinking" instead of "racism."

Though the Japanese may produce 100 percent of the power shovels, consumer electronics and compact disc players bought in America, we can still write better rhymes. It may come to that. During the '80s post-industrial America happened: falling wages, declining productivity, the rise of financial services, computer services, customer services and a shrinking manufacturing base.

Smoke and mirrors: The Reagan recovery—which began in 1982—masked much of the country's decline. Falling commodity prices, the oil-price collapse, a soft dollar and low interest rates all conspired to blow away inflation and produce solid, slow growth. Investors, delighted by all of this, poured their money into a fresh assortment of new stock market toys including stock indexes, options, futures and mutual funds. The "bull market" of the '80s produced a five-year-long \$2 trillion surge in stock prices.

But below the surface the economy became a doomsayer's nirvana. American business ran up \$1 trillion in debt during the '80s, partly to finance takeover battles. More than \$200 billion of that debt is in highly volatile junk bonds, which require fat interest payments. As the decade closes, 40 percent of corporate America's cash flow goes to debt service, up from 19 percent 10 years ago. While U.S. business cut research-and-development budgets to direct cash toward debt repayment, the Japanese built bet-

Market-driven and user-friendly



ter cars.

The U.S. government also did its share of borrowing. The federal deficit ballooned to \$200 billion annually over the decade's final years. The Japanese bought roughly 25 percent of the bonds floated by the U.S. government to pay interest on the deficit. We returned the favor by keeping our markets open and allowing Japanese firms to build final processing plants in the U.S. The Japanese imported products that Americans assembled and sold to one another. This caused the trade deficit to jump to \$16 billion monthly.

While decadence marched on, the U.S. made some spectacular breakthroughs. The collective genius of Silicon Valley rendered the personal computer. The first machines, produced in 1981-82, were weak, slow-moving word processors with little capacity for graphics. Few workers knew how to use them anyway, and programmers didn't seem interested in developing user-friendly languages.

By the mid-'80s all that had changed. Tandy Corp., Texas Instruments, IBM Corp. and Apple Computers were building powerful, imaginative machines running off microprocessors developed in California. Americans bought "home computers." Businesses incorporated the new technology and its vast array of powerful progeny into every facet of production. For example, General Motors workers use personal computers on the factory floor to schedule production, designers trade car designs over vast computer networks and GM departments use huge main-

frame computers to process data across the company's \$100 billion empire.

But America is on the verge of losing its computer supremacy to other powers. The Japanese, with their lower wages and government-supported industrial policy, are building the next generation of computers. A government-coordinated effort is making great strides in developing systems with the capacity to mimic human reasoning. If the Japanese break this technology before the U.S., the cost in future economic development—which will be dependent on highly sophisticated computer technology and software systems—could be crippling.

Then again, American business still provides better color than its competitors. The U.S. in the '80s was shot through with more scandal and greed than almost anywhere in the world. Some of the country's most important financiers found themselves facing

The economy changed our language as businesspeople invented words and titles for a new world. Corporate raider, fax, frequent-flyer mile, spin, synergies, junk bond, globalization—to name a few.

felony charges from Wall Street's "insider trading" schemes. Junk-bond kingpin Michael Milken, worth \$1.2 billion, faces a lifetime behind bars if convicted. Hollywood found the whole scene so sexy it made a movie named, predictably, *Wall Street*.

Risky business: Other scandals provided material that will probably never make it to the big screen—at least not the one at the Roxy. Take Eddie McBirney, the boyish chief executive of \$4.3 billion Sunbelt Savings in Dallas. McBirney flew his board of directors to Las Vegas one year—at company expense. There they reportedly held a meeting that was capped with two women performing a striptease and a lesbian tryst, followed by sexual favors for interested board members.

Not every savings and loan operator behaved so recklessly. Mostly it was just plain criminal stupidity that created the \$200 billion hole that American taxpayers will pay \$1,000 each to fill. In Texas too many thrift owners speculated in land using government-insured deposits. And when oil prices collapsed and the state economy cratered, all that once-valuable land proved worthless. Sane investors would not normally bet all their money on one asset, but there are no laws against stupidity.

Not that the government wasn't aware of the stupidity. As early as 1985 federal regulators knew that the thrift industry's investing practices were heading toward crisis. Two things conspired to keep regulators at bay. First, the Reagan administration was ideologically rabid about keeping government out of banking. Second, thrift executives like Arizona's Charlie Keating knew how to operate—on Capitol Hill. Keating bought protection by making donations to key legislators who intervened on his behalf. His advocates included liberal Sen. Alan Cranston (D-CA), to whom Keating and associates gave \$1 million.

No doubt thrift owners lived well. Recent federal auctions selling the property of expropriated thrifts are instructive. In August, 4,000 bargain hunters crowded into a Dallas warehouse to gawk and bid on a crystal eagle that sold for \$16,700, a silver saddle that sold for \$11,000 and a collection of handmade wagon trains that went for \$35,000. The federal government has also peddled a 1957 Bentley, carved elephant tusks and teak furniture.

Selling off the wares of our bankrupt thrifts may be a fitting way to close out the decade. This was, after all, the decade marketing defined. Preachers like Jim Bakker sold God, presidential aides provided "spin" and General Mills hawked Cheerios fortified with oat bran to a middle class obsessed with heart disease. Americans were segmented into yuppies, buppies, guppies and just about every other category that could provide insight into consumption patterns.

Marketing produced some nearly brilliant brainchildren. One intrepid entrepreneur, spotting a growing trend toward sobriety, recently started a water-of-the-month club. Called Class in a Glass, it provides customers with a monthly six-pack of flavored waters from around the globe for only \$350 a year. Who says conspicuous consumption has to be bad for you? This is, after all, the '80s. □ Kevin Kelly is a Texas-based journalist.

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Superpowers

Continued from page 3

it would seem, required going to school and boning up. Luckily for the present (and who cares what happens beyond that?) this juncture came as ignorance, in the great national know-nothing tradition, was recrudescing in the form of infantile willfulness. This meant that an expedient was at hand by which the world's greatest country could continue to avoid reality and bask in stupidity. Of course, it was show business.

Upset by the real gore and social divisiveness of Vietnam, Americans did not become so much pacifists as partisans of star wars. As in the case of AIDS (when pornography flourished as actual sex became worrisome), the country opted for theatrical militarism. The people applauded kitten-strangling missions to Libya and Grenada that appeased the

bloodlust without serious risk.

More things that will change the world happened in the '80s than at any other time in the postwar era. A whole way of thinking—or really, not thinking—started to crumble in the lands of the superpowers. But what about the other 90 percent of humankind?

At the heart of the American view of the Cold War was the belief that the world was either pro-U.S., pro-Soviet or a vacuum where the two sides vied for advantage. In fact, the people in the supposed vacuum were all the while going about their own business while paying only the minimum deference necessary to the battle going on above their heads. While the Soviets and Americans were deluding themselves that other nations would emulate them even without coercion or bribery, the world was in fact bringing its own power to bear on two of its larger but no less vulnerable peoples.

Thankfully for this country, most of that power has so far been commercial. We are buying everything that Western Europe and the Pacific Rim countries can produce. We are paying for it by strangling the Third World to debt and, when that is not sufficient, by our own insolvency. Despite our own earlier claims that the world would somehow become more open, democratic and Americanized by subjecting itself to our economic accession, there are few signs that we are becoming more sophisticated or cosmopolitan now that the world is starting to dominate us. Sumo wrestling, eating raw fish and taking tea breaks are not catching on along with the Walkmans and the VCRs.

By the same token, we don't seem to care who's in charge in the boardroom or even if the boardroom is in Tokyo, Singapore or Rotterdam, so long as we are allotted our generous ration of products and entertainment.

Our European allies, even the most recalcitrant of them like Margaret Thatcher, long ago accepted that the modern social democratic welfare state was the basis not only of their prosperity but also of the common point upon which they could build a form of Continental unity to match that of the U.S. and Soviet bloc. With the latter now cracking up, it appears that Western Europe will be the beneficiary of this process, with Eastern Europe trading its subservience to Moscow for a more benign dependency on the Common Market.

The swamp of atavism: The Soviets, at the close of the '80s, have retained a modicum of goodwill for their failed experiment, if only because it, unlike capitalism, was actually thought out and aimed at improving the world rather than simply commercializing it. Even if the Soviets messed up, Western intellectuals at least want to retain the belief that ideas rather than blind forces, such as the all-hallowed market, can make things better. But that small stock of beneficence seems a drop in the bucket of Soviet needs. The best that can be hoped is that while the Soviet Union struggles in the swamp of its atavism, it does not strike out blindly.

The Japanese, with no natural allies thanks to Asian memories of World War II, remain the most vulnerable of the economic giants, but also the people with the greatest knack for getting the most out of what they have.

The outlook for the Third World, including the Chinese, is as bad as that for the Soviets. For if capitalism is hopeless poverty and debt, and if revolution has come up short, then what remains?

As we head for the next millenium, our own country, with its clearly evident capacity to provide us all with a decent life and its glaring inability to do so, seems to be waiting for...what?

We're all waiting. Something more than Godot has got to be coming. American-style capitalism has proffered glitz to some, indigence to more than a few and mindlessness to the many. The existing revolutionary forms of socialism based on dictatorship have collapsed. Only in the First World states with deep histories where the market has not totally overpowered community does there seem to be some viability.

The '80s busted up the set pieces. In the '90s, we'll be rearranging them. God only knows in what order. That's for history to judge.

Peter Karman is a contributing editor of *In These Times*.

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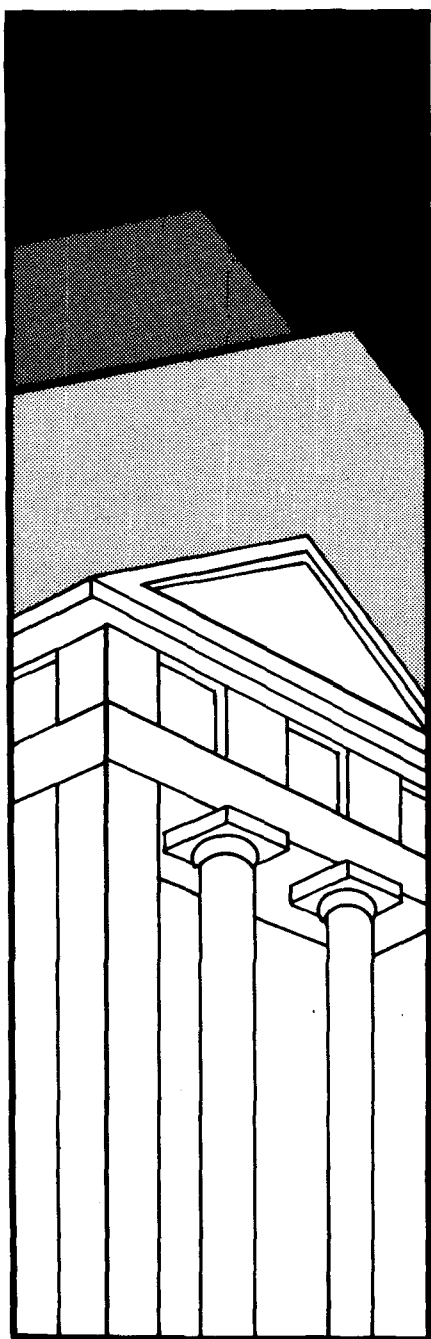
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By Diana Johnstone

THE '80S PROVIDED ENOUGH LESSONS IN modesty to make anyone hesitate to predict where anything is leading. The meaning of the '80s will ultimately depend on where they are leading...heaven help us.

The '80s were a decade when nothing worked—when some two centuries of optimism about humanity's ability to determine its fate ran up against a series of failures that put the whole project in doubt.

Third World "development" didn't work. Poor countries sank into irretrievable indebtedness and famine, suffering a breakdown of social structures as masses of uprooted peasants turned cities into provisional encampments. Reckless pillage of natural resources began to threaten the planet's long-range habitability. But the failure of the Western capitalist development model was obscured by the ballyhoo over another.

Soviet-style socialism didn't work. There is no need to dwell on this widely celebrated failure.

The space shuttle didn't work. Several rockets didn't work. The B-2 bomber didn't work. Terrorism didn't work. Anti-terrorism didn't work. The anti-drug crusade didn't work. Efforts to make peace in regional conflicts didn't work. Liberalization in China didn't work.

The Soviet threat didn't work. The real Soviet threat turned out to be the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl, which spectacularly didn't work—the top failure of a decade of failure.

Now the good news: The arms race didn't work. The Cold War didn't work.

The first half of this clumsy decade was dedicated to voluntarist capitalism, presided over by a third-rate movie actor whose election bore witness to the American people's desire not to face reality if there can be money in make-believe.

Reality was up for grabs, and strangely enough, in the middle of the '80s, to the total surprise of everyone, somebody came along and grabbed it: Mikhail Gorbachov. Gorbachov stunned the world, arousing an enthusiasm worthy of a Messiah simply by admitting the obvious truth—that things weren't working.

The Soviet leader decided to shut down the Cold War as an economic measure. This deeply annoyed U.S. strategists who believed the Cold War was an all-time hit that could play just as well for another 40 years. But without the Russian bear as co-star, there was no way to keep the show on the road.

The end of the Cold War let the German cat out of the bag. With the vanishing of the Soviet threat, the Cold War's structural function stood out like a stripped skeleton: to keep Germany divided. So the Cold War was replaced on editorial pages by "the German question."

For Europe, the '80s saw the end of the Cold War and the political comeback of the Germans—of the "Germans" rather than of "Germany." The '80s were politically marked not so much by the German state or states as by the new movements that developed with special vigor and intellectual force in West Germany—especially the ecological movement and the movement against the nuclear arms race.

The failure of the arms race was the failure

Hopes lie with Germans as old models flounder

of the military Keynesianism practiced by the U.S. for 40 years. It was killed, both politically and economically, by the Reagan overdose.

The arms buildup of the early '80s against the "Evil Empire" was too much for Western public opinion, which began to rebel against the permanent dangers of nuclear annihilation. The cutting edge of this rebellion came from the Germans, assigned to the front lines of nuclear confrontation between East

EUROPE

and West. The German peace movement had a special political significance precisely because it was German. It was the occasion for the political self-assertion of a postwar generation of West Germans whose striking shift of values away from military power toward peaceful values of ecology, feminism and democracy effectively undermined perceptions of "the German threat" in Eastern Europe and made it possible for Soviet leaders to contemplate radical changes in their own European policy.

The arms buildup was also too much for the Evil Empire. The new Soviet leadership under Gorbachov took drastic measures to forestall the prospect of a new high-technology phase of the arms race that was beyond the Soviet economy's means. To this extent, the Reagan policy of "spending them to death" was admittedly a success. However, the success of this extremist edge of U.S. policy destabilized and undermined the long-term prospects of the U.S. military-industrial complex itself by weakening its geopolitical rationale.

Seen from Western Europe, the outcome of the Reagan years is that the U.S. has lost its power of attraction as an economic, social and political model.

At the same time, its economic rationale was undermined by the growing awareness of the inadequacy of the "spin-off" effect of military spending on overall U.S. industrial performance, especially in relation to its main competitors, Japan and West Germany. However, the Reagan binge left a heritage of debt that weakened U.S. capacity to lead a fundamental change of economic policy. American politics also remained skewed in favor of the lobbies interested in perpetuating military spending, despite the increasingly lamented "depletion" of the civilian economy by the military sector.

As economist Richard DuBoff points out, what Reaganite military spending really depleted was the U.S. public sector. Public services and infrastructure are in terrible shape. This depletion seems also to have weakened the political forces connected with a healthy public sector, making a shift toward constructive spending that much more difficult. During the '80s, the American left has obviously not found a political answer to this dilemma.

Seen from Western Europe, the outcome of the Reagan years is that the United States has lost its power of attraction as an economic, social and political model.

No French model: In the early '80s, oddly enough, the Reaganite bluff seemed to have some success in Europe. The greatest success came where it was least expected, in France. The election of Socialist François Mitterrand as president of France only a few months after Reagan took office seemed at first to offer a countermodel. For the European left, the French left's inability to develop a countermodel was one of the first big failures of the '80s.

A fundamental reason for this failure was the nature of the French economy, whose productive apparatus was not geared to profit from the modicum of social Keynesianism introduced by Mitterrand's first government. To oversimplify, the consumer goods whose sales rose when low-income French consumers had a little more money to spend tended to be imported from Germany. French industry had been officially encouraged to concentrate on such prestigious sectors as aerospace, nuclear power and armaments. Whatever the egalitarian rhetoric of the French left, it took over a country whose industrial structures were extremely hierarchic, both in personnel management and in choice of products. This could not be changed without an upheaval that the French were in no way prepared to undergo.

Paradoxically, the very fact that French free enterprise proved unable to respond to Keynesian stimulation helped persuade French Socialists to preach in favor of "free enterprise" values, traditionally neglected in France in favor of appeals for government subsidies of one sort or another. For a few years, French propagandists pointed to the supposed successes of Reaganism as proof of the wonders of "liberalism," meaning free enterprise.

France also had a military-industrial com-

plex that went on alert when a couple of Communists entered the government, pressing Mitterrand to align with the Reagan administration against the German peace movement in the controversy over new Pershing and cruise nuclear missiles.

A less obvious factor in the French alignment with Reagan's America was the expansion of the U.S. import market during the years of the big spenders, when the dollar was at an all-time high and the rich were getting richer. Reaganites were good customers for French luxury goods.

But the Bush period risks being as much fun as a hangover. The growth of the U.S. trade deficit suggests that the spending spree cannot go on forever, and protectionism is in the air—disguised, of course, as righteous retaliation against the protectionism of others. It is no longer prudent to count on the American market.

The later '80s saw a revision in French policy much more discreet than the early-'80s contest between "socialism" and "liberalism." The two-year interlude of conservative government under Prime Minister Jacques Chirac added the failure of "liberalism" to the earlier failure of "socialism." Mitterrand's re-election in 1988 marked an end to the whole debate.

Two lessons concerning the state have been widely drawn from the French story of the '80s. The first is that the nation-state, or at least a nation-state on the scale of France, is no longer a unit large enough to set macroeconomic policy that conflicts with its major trade partners. Economic interdependence challenges the nation-state as the principal level of political decision-making.

The second lesson is merely the reaffirmation of a general social consensus. What most people want is neither "socialism"—so long as no one knows what it is—nor "liberalism" on the American model, but rather a mixed economy able to support a social welfare state.

The German model: In short, at the end of the '80s, the French left had come around to what it despised in the '70s, "the German model" of social democracy. Eastern Europe was looking in the same direction. This year, the Hungarian ruling party abolished itself as a Leninist communist party and vowed to cultivate social democracy on the model of the West German SPD.

For most of the world today, if there is any model people would like to follow, it is social democracy, West German style. However, the chances of their being able to do so look dim. Indeed, there is no guarantee that social democracy can survive in Western Europe itself. The dire misery of Africa to the south and the unpredictable upheavals to the east make the maintenance of a little island of relative well-being extremely problematic. The standard of living in northwestern Europe is out of the reach of most of the world, and it is precisely in that part of the world that the heavy-consumption way of life is being most sharply questioned.

A completely new model of development is required for a world where the old models are not working. Germans have been the first to raise consciousness of the environmental crisis. Moreover, Germany has investment capital, know-how and an industrial capacity that have not been completely sold out to a military-industrial complex. And so at the end of the '80s, the European left tends to focus whatever hopes it can still muster on the Germans. What a surprise. □

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KID stuff

By Tom Engelhardt

WAS BORN ON JULY 20, 1944, IN NEW YORK CITY; my daughter, on July 27, 1979, in the same city. I passed into the '50s staring with fascination at *Life* magazine photos of haggard, begrimed, desperate-looking GIs retreating from a reservoir in a distant country called Korea; my daughter lives in the '80s, trying not to stare at people in no uniforms at all but no less haggard, begrimed and desperate-looking on our block.

Two wishes, no presents: I remember a '50s wish of mine. Money was short, my parents warned me in the winter of 1953 or '54, and there might be no Christmas presents. I never prayed more fervently for anything in my life than I did then for a game called ProHockey. I must have made that prayer fervently known, for I got my thing that Christmas morning—with the clear knowledge that my parents had purchased it at a cost called "sacrifice."

My daughter wishes for things too. But she has another sort of wish, a candle-blowing-out birthday wish that hasn't varied since she was three or four, a wish told to us, until recently, only in a whisper. She wishes that all the poor people in the world would have a home and some money.

The flinch and the squeezed hand: As a boy, I thought I was poor. My daughter could never make such a mistake. For much of the '50s my parents were in debt. For some of the time, my father was either out of work or drifting from job to job (and, it turned out, bar to bar). As soon as I was "asleep," my parents fought violently over how the bills would be paid (especially "my" bills). It was pardonable that I would not grasp the difference between being poor and living a middle-class life without the money fully in hand; pardonable because I had probably never seen a truly poor person. Yes, there was a "panhandler" (Shorty, my father called him) in our neighborhood. But he was a "bum." Yes, under the El on Third Avenue, where the shadows fell darkly and you passed flophouse after flophouse, you could see the



Illustration/collage by Peter Hannan, "Homeless" photo © 1989 Mel Rosenthal

IN THESE TIMES

13

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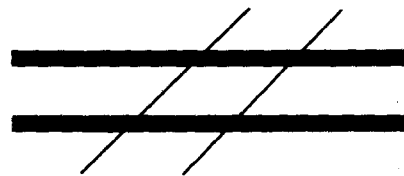
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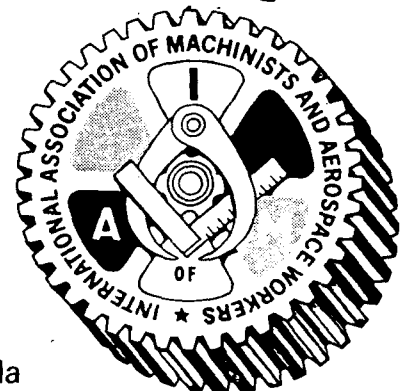


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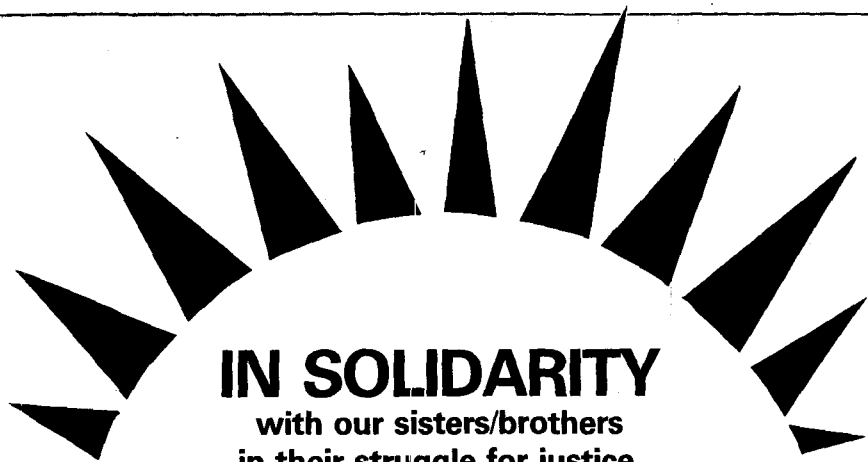


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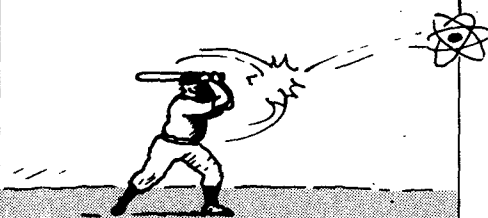
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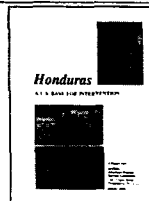
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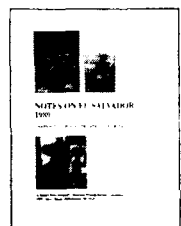
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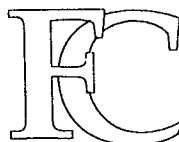
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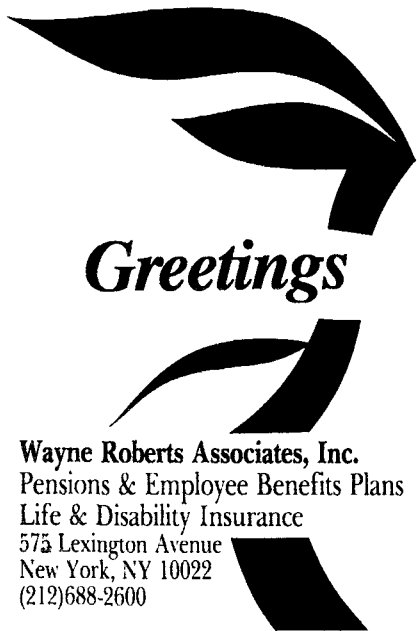
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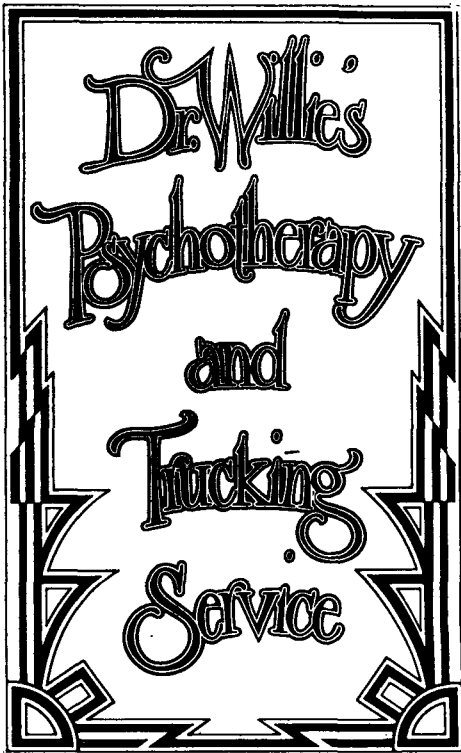
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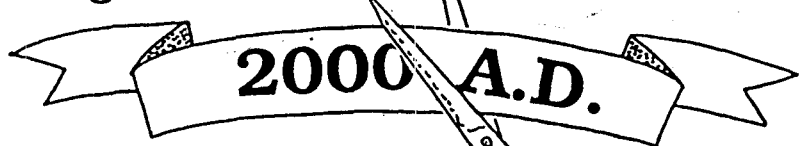
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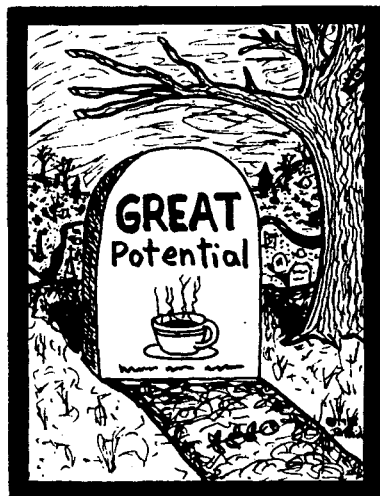
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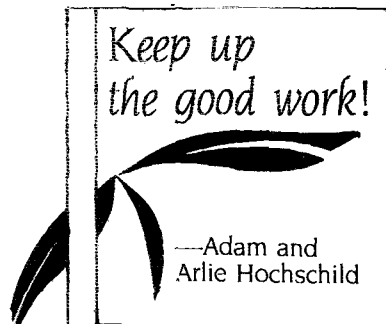
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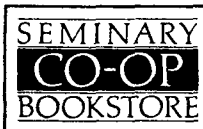
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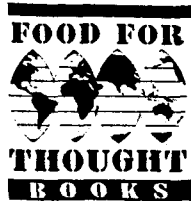
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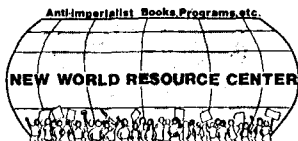


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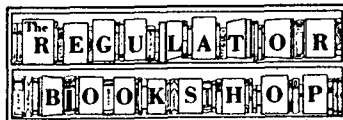
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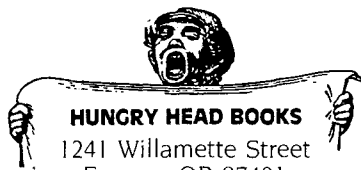
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bodies of the drunks, dark lumps on the street. But you drove fast there, with your windows up. And it was all somehow so far away, much farther than Korea.

For my '80s daughter, it's as near as the nearest doorway, as near as the sudden squeeze on a held hand, the instant flinch of her body, the unexplained switch from one side of me to the other as we walk to school, as near as the jingling cups of change, the pleading (or hostile) faces, the endless lines at the neighborhood soup kitchen, the man with dreadlocks shouting as we pass by. As near as fear itself.

Generations of fear: Those who remember crouching between the metal feet of their desks while sirens screamed know the '50s had fears nostalgia can't erase. But those fears, powerful as they were, had a strange intangibility. They came from the past (the Great Depression), the future (the Bomb), or far away (Red China, Red Russia). The snakes under my bed, the Martians and robbers whose shadows flickered through my venetian blinds at night, were real enough, but who could see them? Yes, the neighbors might be "infected," but with what? And in the meanwhile, the present looked clean, white and well off. The middle class lived in an imperial isolation from which the poor and nonwhite were hidden. That was our true Age of Illusion. Class and race (in the North at least) were Great American Secrets. Nobody who lived through the '50s could be surprised that poverty was a '60s "discovery."

Fear, for my daughter, is as tangible as the gunshot outside our window, the body sprawled dead across the street (evidence of a mangled drug deal), the sounds of footsteps on the fire escape. Perhaps if they weren't real she would have to invent them to stay awake at night. But the need is nil. The '80s brought fear out from under the child's bed and terrifyingly personified it in the most literal victims of the decade, the sometimes crazed, desperate homeless.

The triumph of Reagan: It has often been said that the Age of Reagan was a time when Americans retreated into illusion—America, the Movie; Grenada, the Invasion; Family, those Old-Time Values; and so on. But in my daughter's life you can see the ways in which the expansion of illusion only reflected how painfully close, how visible and threatening a previously hidden world had become—a world that might strike out at you anytime, a pit into which you might tumble without notice.

Reagan's triumph lay in the masterful way he Calcutta-cized urban America, and in how he made the middle class pay to maintain the increasingly difficult illusion that nothing had happened. Thanks to Reaganism, consumer capitalism increased its wealth immeasurably by depositing the remains of imperial politics on our doorsteps. In the '80s, it turned out, Threat sold Product.

Padding and privilege: In the Eisenhower '50s, that era of global dominance, for a white city boy like me the invisible padding of empire extended way out there, and that padding meant protection. I never doubted I could walk anywhere, take any bus, any subway. The wealth of empire meant that I, a relatively timid child, did not fear for my own safety. (It was, of course, this very safety—read isolation, read blandness, read blindness—that made our lives so horrifically dreary, so basically lonely.

Most of my friends, like me, spent most of our time waiting for whatever this was to end and life, whatever *that* was, to begin.)

Nonetheless, and despite my family's immediate problems, I grew up with a form of privilege—imperial privilege—inconceivable for my daughter. For her, the padding out there has shredded, and the theme of her '80s childhood has been not safety but intrusion. As that invisible padding of empire withdrew, so the quite visible padding in her room deepened, and every inch of it had to be paid for.

Two rooms: The imperial vistas of the '50s were vast and, looked at from the '80s, remarkably (even horribly) empty—like the sightlines Baron Haussmann cleared on Paris' great boulevards to gun down the mob. What is striking, in retrospect, about that Golden Age of suburban consumerism was the relative bareness of its interiors.

It was an era of large objects. The ever-vaster refrigerator, the TV console, the washing machine. These entered the house, but no rush hour of consumer goods followed. And children had hardly been discovered. My own room was quite spare. My mother, an artist, painted its walls with sprightly nur-

Childhood in the '80s is a far cry from the '50s.

sery-rhyme scenes and, later, marching grenadiers, and there was a bed, a chair, a desk, a lamp, an old wooden radio, a few dolls, a few games, books, my soldiers, my zoo animals, a six-gun and holster and, by the end of the '50s, a cheap record player—each limited and distinct purchase entering my life with its own special history, its own familial price tag attached. And like interior space, time in the '50s had, for a child, a certain bareness to it. You read, daydreamed, lay in your room and were bored, or tried to escape the house. Children being an afterthought of empire, their time and space were, by default, strangely, even painfully, their own.

My daughter's room could be mistaken for a toy store (and her time for a busy adult's schedule). Toys of all sizes, shapes and substances simply pour in. From any friend's birthday party comes a flood of little plastic things of the sort that once resided mainly in cereal and crackerjack boxes; mementos from any trip, any theme park; gifts from friends, relatives; Christmas, birthdays, who knows what and where. In her room are not so much distinct objects as a single blur that represents not childish greed, but childhood

lived in the shadow of a corporate world whose gaze turned homeward to discover the child's room as a colonial land.

Toys-R-You: As the relatively unfilled '50s room gave way to the toy store, so the modest '50s toy store gave way to the suburban toy "supermarket," packed floor to ceiling, aisle by aisle, with dizzying goodies. So, too, the individual toy deal (even in the '50s there were millions to be made off a Howdy Doody or a Hopalong Cassidy anything) gave way to the meshed corporate package in which all the forms that entertain/sell children on the consumer-cartoon way of life became one: TV, Film, Movie, Cassette Tape, Video, Theme Park, Toy Store, Fast-food Outlet—each sold another angle on the same vision of childhood to children now obliged to roam one vast entertainment stage without ever leaving home.

The intensity and rapidity of this transformation of the child into mini-consumer, of childhood into a lifestyle, of clothes and playthings into corporate logos, this colonization in miniature was capped in 1989 by the absorption of Henson Associates into the Disney powerhouse. It wasn't just that Mickey Mouse and Kermit the Frog could now occupy the same screen, lunchbox or theme park, but that these great, now-fused symbols of child culture in our time were poised to carry on into the '90s and beyond, promising yet further transformation of childhood as consumption.

The Philco and the Walkman: Behind my bed was one of those wooden Philco radios whose arched dial lit golden when turned on. At night, in the dark, I would listen to the crackle of Brooklyn Dodgers baseball. But nothing could lower the sound to the necessary whisper or still the loud click of the on/off knob. Parental discovery was a constant danger. That radio of my childhood (TV entered our house in 1954) could not have been built for an audience of one. Nothing in that house, in fact, had truly been built for an audience of one.

In 1987, we bought my daughter a child's version of the Walkman. On our next car trip, she slipped in a tape and slipped on the earphones. Suddenly, the car was plunged into silence. I nudged her and suggested she turn it up so that we could all listen. "I can't," she said, startled by my question. And, to my surprise, she couldn't, for the Walkman's mission was a fiercely privatizing one. It was meant to fill not a room but a head, and only that head, with sound, to turn you inward without throwing you back on the one thing the '80s package couldn't offer for sale, the self.

The Walkman was, in this sense, corporate culture's response to its own "ghetto blaster." All that noise from "Them," out there (forget who actually made the thing), that techno-threat from below, could be muted into nothingness. The Walkman could offer the consumer, child or adult, a way to blast a corridor of privatization, an intrusionless space no wider than that between two ears, from the "safety" of the padded interior to wherever you had to go.

Enter technology: Below was Threat; in-between, Fear; and above...well, above was out of sight. On the news pages, the predictable

reigned—the latest presidential campaign, the latest oil spill, the latest sex scandal. Far away in the Second World, where people were trying to take back their lives with their hands, there was still wonder and surprise. In our world, wonder and surprise existed only out of sight in a realm where vast corporate entities and the military economy merged and purged, spawned and planned, transfixing themselves on a global scale and via a technology beyond ordinary comprehension.

Such elemental transformations entered my daughter's world only as product (to redress was to buy) and as promise. And the promise was this: if you could buy the right combination of technology, life could be transformed into a meaningful flow of entertainment events within the padded cell of the house.

So to the TV was added the VCR, the perfect child entertainment device, and with it, the movie of your child's "choice" came home (and at the same time vanished from your local movie house). The VCR offered children a new sense of "control"—control now being defined as the ability to sit on your sofa and replay your favorite scene from *The Parent Trap* as many times as you liked.

As the "personal" computer entered the house, so too did Earl Weaver's Baseball Software, Space Invaders and Donkey Kong; that is, the penny arcade came home. As the Walkman entered the home, music privatized; with the camcorder (adult or child variety), you could entertain yourself with images of yourself in the privacy of your house; with the food processor, the microwave oven, the hot-air popcorn popper and a host of other things that went whirr in the night, fast food became a home industry. The large-screen TV, the Nintendo power set, the electronic keyboard, the CD player, the electronic talking doll all made the '80s home a dazzling, no-boredom, techno-entertainment center for children.

Whichever elements of this package you could afford to put together for yourself or your child, the result was to make you everywhere ever more needy of its other elements, each element a preview for the next techno-object of desire, and all of them a preview for (and financial contribution to) the one spectacle not available on your home screen—the ongoing multinational transformation of the globe.

Back to the future: It's 5:30 on a weekday afternoon and my daughter and I are watching the '50s together—*Leave It to Beaver* on a local channel. It's buzz-out time as TV recycles its past. My daughter loves these ancient shows. Does the black-and-whiteness seem somehow reassuring to her, reminder as it is to me of the sparseness of imperial technology once-upon-a-time? Colorful ads for half a dozen childhood products spring onto the screen, sandwiching, not any '50s I knew, but just a little more filler in the unavoidable home spectacle that is my daughter's decade.

What can she make of it all? Who knows. To a 10-year-old the past is still hazy and the '80s not a decade, but just what is, nothing more than the process she's been living through, a process with no end in sight.

She can't remember when it began, and I doubt in January she'll have the feeling anything in particular is ending—unless it occurs to the corporate complex up there somewhere that fear of the '90s—or of the coming millennium—will sell even more Product than fear in the '80s has. □

Tom Engelhardt is a senior editor at Pantheon Books.

EDITORIAL



A new historical age for Hungary and the world

Speaking last week from the balcony of Hungary's Parliament—where 33 years ago Imre Nagy had also proclaimed Hungary's independence and the formation of a multiparty state—Hungarian Socialist Party leader Matyas Szouros said that the country was at the beginning of a new historical age. It was one of the few times in more than 40 years that the leader of a Hungarian government was not simply spouting rhetoric at a public occasion. Not since Nagy attempted to transform his country into a democratic socialist republic in 1956 have a leader's words resonated so thoroughly with the spirit and desires of the Hungarian people.

But there is a crucial difference between then and now. Nagy's fledgling democratic reforms were instituted a scant three years after Stalin's death and just months after Nikita Khrushchov had made his secret speech denouncing the evils of Stalinism and launching his own short-lived reform movement. Nagy's appointment as prime minister had been arranged by Khrushchov, but the speed with which Nagy moved away from Stalinism was not. And when Nagy announced Hungary's intention to withdraw from the newly formed Warsaw Pact in the midst of the British and French attack on the Suez Canal, the Moscow leaders reverted to form and crushed Hungary's revolution under the treads of Red Army tanks. Nagy himself was arrested, given a show trial and hanged two years later for treason. "I tried to save the honor of the word 'socialism' in the Danube River Valley," he had said at his sentencing, but to no avail. Refusing offers to save his life by repenting, Nagy chose to die, confident that history would condemn his assassins.

Now, just as his remains have been rescued from an unmarked grave and have been reburied with honor, so too have his reforms been disinterred. And this time Hungary's political reforms are not only looked upon benignly by the Soviet government but also are an integral part of the movement for reform sweeping the Communist world.

The Hungarian reforms go even further than those in Poland, not to mention the rest of Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. But almost everywhere in the Communist world there is either recognition or concern about the extent to which Communism as a political system has lost its viability. As Szouros himself proclaimed, the new Hungarian Republic is going to be not only an "independent, democratic and legal state," but also one "in which the values of bourgeois democracy and democratic socialism are expressed equally."

Changes in the country's institutions so far have been profound. On October 7, by a vote of 1,005 to 159, the ruling Communist party changed its name to the Socialist Party and rejected the concept of Marxism-Leninism at a congress called to prepare for elections that must be held before next June. Since then Hungary's Parliament, in which 70 percent of the members belong to what is now the Socialist Party, voted overwhelmingly to disband party cells in the workplace—traditionally one of the party's main means of social control. The new law requires cells to be dissolved immediately in courts and in parliamentary and prosecutorial offices, within 90 days before the planned elections in private workplaces, and by 1990 and 1991 in the civil service and the army. In addition, Parliament has legalized opposition political parties, thereby giving official sanction to a multiparty system, and it has voted to disband a militia that had been created specifically to protect the party after the 1956 uprising.

These changes are expressions of a nearly universal desire among the nations of Eastern Europe for a pluralist democracy in which those who hold power do so because they have earned popular respect and are freely chosen. This desire has created a new duality in popular attitudes toward the Soviet Union. Along with the bitterness and hatred bred by Soviet domination and intervention, there is widespread gratitude for the changes going on there, and especially for Mikhail Gorbachov and his declarations of non-intervention. As Prime Minister Miklos Nemeth said on television three weeks ago, Hungary no longer had to fear foreign intervention. "This time," he said, "our hands are not tied down." Similarly, Gyula Ober-sovszky, who was editor of the first revolutionary newspaper in 1956 and whose death sentence was commuted to imprisonment, told the crowd at the Parliament rally: "I'm rooting for Gorbachov. I'm rooting and worrying about him. Our freedom is an illusion until Moscow becomes free."

For their part, the Soviet leadership has proclaimed a new attitude and new policies in regard to foreign interventions. Just last week Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze admitted that the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan was a "gross violation" of Soviet laws and of "intraparty and civil norms and ethics." "For the first time in many years," he said, "not a single Soviet soldier is participating—nor, I'm sure, will participate—in military actions anywhere in the world." And, he added, the Soviets "have now put forth the initiative of curtailing all of our military bases abroad, as well as our military presence there, by the year 2000. We are prepared to head toward the dissolution of the military-political blocs in Europe on a mutual basis."

In short, it is not only Hungary that enjoys the prospect of entering a new historical age. If the Soviet initiatives are responded to positively in Washington, that could be true for the whole world. ■

IN THESE TIMES

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LETTERS

Deadly

HAVING ANALYZED NEW YORK POLITICS SO POOR-ly, Daniel Lazare now seeks to continue to marginalize the left by advocating we place ourselves in a moral wasteland with his ridiculous assertion that the goal of our nation's war on drugs is "mass cerebral anesthetization" (*ITT*, Oct. 18).

Of course, no one opposes the use of certain drugs—including alcohol—in moderation. But moderation is not the issue here. His free-flying libertarian—and frivolous—commentary concerning alcohol must be a parody. It surely can't be for real! "Americans are drinking less, but not working better as a result," writes Lazare. What is he advocating here? And his assertion that alcohol has been known to "help save marriages" seems inane, but perhaps Lazare is actually commenting here on the state of marriage in the '80s.

As the daughter of an alcoholic father, I take this issue quite seriously. But I saw my father suffer from a disease that took his life in an ugly manner and caused him to lose his ability to work—after "settling himself down" with one too many beers, as Lazare would have it. I find this article offensive to the millions of people who are the victims of alcoholism and other deadly drug-related diseases.

Lazare's article—and this viewpoint expounded upon by many leftists in the name of libertarianism—is facile and leads with a literally deadly argument. By the way, it makes no sense politically if we ever expect to speak to anyone other than ourselves. The left shouldn't be sorting out the relative evils of alcohol and other drugs. That completely misses the point. Whether Lazare likes it or not, whole communities are being ravaged by drugs. There is a reason that Jesse Jackson has joined in this anti-drug campaign. Just because society is hypocritical about alcohol consumption doesn't mean the left should be screaming about authoritarian conspiracies when incompetence, hypocrisy and grandstanding may be more the point about how the Bush administration is fighting the war on drugs. We're supposed to offer a moral vision of a better society, remember?

Jo-Ann Mort
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Daniel Lazare replies: Let me state my views as simply and concisely as I can.

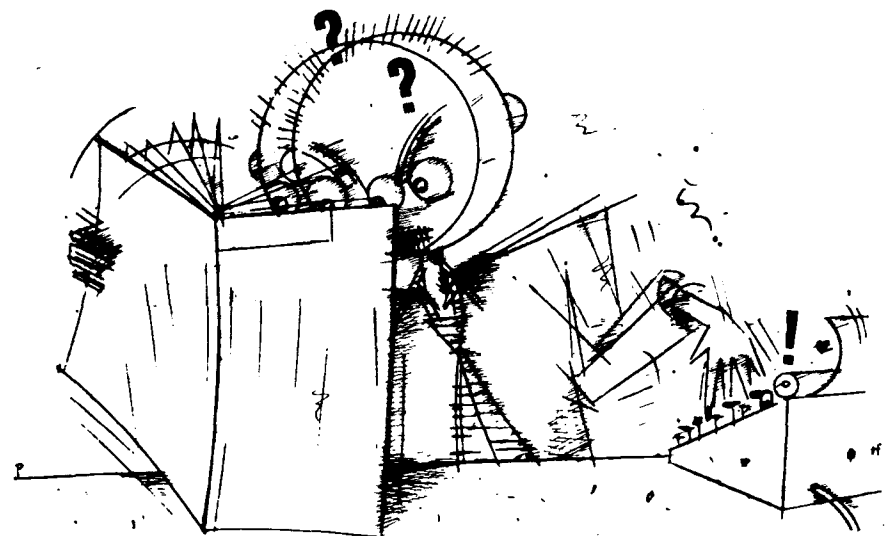
1. Alcohol can be horribly destructive, as can cocaine, heroin and, of course, cigarettes.

2. Nonetheless, the answer to addiction, whether involving alcohol or any other substance, is not to throw users in jail and punish their suppliers but to offer medical and psychological treatment, moral persuasion and sympathy. Criminalizing drugs means criminalizing users, which means, in turn, driving them underground and away from the professional help they need.

3. The current hysteria over drugs will do nothing except fuel more hysteria.

4. Hysteria plays into the hands of budding authoritarians like drug czar William Bennett, who are always on the lookout for an excuse for military intervention abroad or to impose martial law here at home.

5. While Jesse Jackson is free to preach against drugs all he wants, he obviously



goes well beyond moral exhortation when he calls for legal sanctions and military mobilization, as he has repeatedly since 1985. While Bennett leads the charge, Jackson concentrates on bringing up left-liberal stragglers from the rear, which puts both on a collision course with oblivion.

Reparations

RECENT DISCUSSIONS OF BLACK REPARATIONS (*ITT*, Oct. 11) recall an earlier episode, James Forman's presentation of the Black Manifesto to churches and synagogues in April 1969. Forman's act led legal scholar Boris Bittker to examine *The Case for Black Reparations* in a book of that title published in 1973. Bittker presents a careful legal analysis of how the case for reparations could be structured within the present legal system.

Mark Tushnet
Washington, D.C.

Flag burning

I AGREE WITH THE AYATOLLAH BUSH THAT IT ought to be illegal to burn the American flag. Otherwise, what's the point in burning it? And, for better or worse, this is our country: the flag has a right to be respected.

But it is the "oil-producing desert tribesmen" of Texas who have forced the complete legalization of flag burning by catering to their "Arab extremism." Their sentences for flag burning of months in jail and thousands of dollars in fines are really a slap in the face to the spirit of mature toleration required by a healthy democracy.

And why don't the Texans invoke similar laws against intrusive public pornography? You will note that Texans are not exactly enraged by the fact that their own state flag is even being used to skimpily clad the

cheerleaders for the Dallas Cowboys. Half-nude women displaying themselves in such a manner, specifically to provoke male aggression, is in the same offensive category as flag burning—and definitely not a "political statement."

Whenever you see a gigantic flag waving over a used car lot, you know what it means: get ready to be taken, and no apologies. Bush is similarly seeking to detract from the way he is continuing Reagan's "Hollywood Dynasty"—and its destruction of any family-oriented economy for the sake of military expansion.

Huang Mei Yuen
Brattleboro, Vt.

Pandering?

WHILE IT MAY BE GRATIFYING FOR PROGRESSIVES to read a former police chief (*ITT*, Oct. 18) label the Bush-Bennett drug proposals as "the prescriptions of demagogues," I suggest caution to *In These Times* and its readers in dealing with Tony Bouza.

Writing in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* earlier this year, Bouza informed his readers that no serious observer advocated the legalization of drugs. The '60s-influenced *In These Times* readership gets no such pronouncements, only the hope that a free people's discussions (another commission?) will lead to a common approach. Bouza accuses politicians of pandering and of offering too little challenge to the imaginations of their audience. How ironic.

John Kochevar
Minneapolis

Tony Bouza replies: I wrote that no major police figure has proposed legalization, not that no "serious observer" advocates it. I am aware of several public figures, includ-

ing Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke and Harvard University law professor Alan Der-showitz, who advocate legalization, but I wasn't writing about public figures in general.

Me and me?

HAVE MIKE MOORE'S FAMOUS PRO-LITTLE GUY politics (*ITT*, Oct. 11) hit the wall? Moore depended on crews of skilled workers and artists whose hands and eyes affected *Roger and Me* more than unemployed Flint workers ever affected the quality of GM cars. Yet he shares credit with no one. (Maybe it's just auteur-obsessed critics.)

The feeling I get reading *In These Times*' review is that an entrepreneur risked his money, pushed his imagination and poof! a successful product—sans labor.

Roger Smith's vision of the corporate future is a worker-free, robot utopia. How different is Moore's public approach to his own enterprise?

Scott Holmquist
San Francisco

The INS fetal position

MICHAEL BETTENCOURT'S ARTICLE ON THE case for fetal personhood (*ITT*, Sept. 20) sheds needed light on a subject that has generated mostly heat. It seems to me, however, that the argument is moot since the federal government long ago decided against fetal personhood. It did this by letting stand a (perhaps de facto) ruling by the immigration service that a pregnant female immigrant constituted a single person under the rigid quota laws of the early part of this century. If she was so unfortunate to have her baby while the ship carrying her to the U.S. was at sea, the new arrival was officially deemed to have exceeded the quota and mother and child were denied entrance, unless an altruistic person could be found who would relinquish his place to the infant.

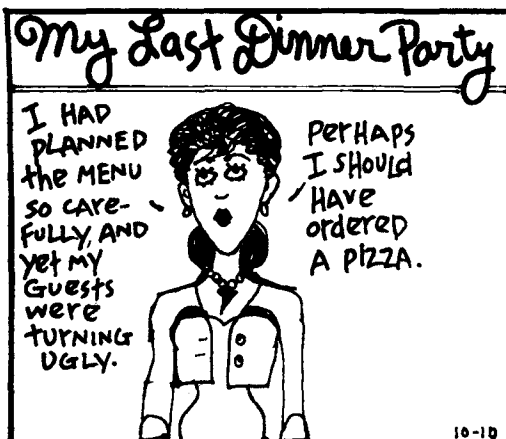
If, on the other hand, the birth took place after the mother cleared immigration, her baby became a birthright citizen of the United States, having been born (even though not conceived) on U.S. ground.

By the government's own ruling, a fetus becomes a person when it is born.

Oscar B. Stram
Paoli, Pa.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander

By Jeff Reid

IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST of times. Repetitious, I know, but that's the '80s for you. Like having déjà vu and amnesia at the same time, to borrow a line from comedian Steven Wright.

Now that it's the Morning After in America, it's clear that cheap nostalgia is purchased at the price of a clouded vision. The Age of Reagan was backward-looking, when not downright retrograde. And if lax management style could produce the Iran-contra scandal—as Reagan apologists contended—maybe it could have a trickle-down effect on the rest of the culture as well. Yet the spirit of the time is a more tenuous link than cause and effect, especially in a culture as fragmented as ours.

If the '70s were the self-obsessed "Me Decade," in Tom Wolfe's phrase, the '80s could be seen as the mean decade, as one wag put it, or the media decade, in the words of another. This "decade that wasn't" was really a number of violent forces colliding, even as the Teflon prez and the timid press assured everyone that all those people screaming and dying "off camera" were minor wrinkles to be ironed out. Talk about off the record!

As always, much of the big picture can only be glimpsed with peripheral vision. So if what follows seems like snippets in search of a unifying theme, maybe it's oddly appropriate. It's the '80s all over.

Steal-industry comeback: Theft, a major '80s motif, made some ominous parallel rips in the social fabric. Viruses like herpes and HIV, for instance, which reproduce by stealing genetic material from the cells around them, wreaked well-documented havoc with their pilferings. And big business was not immune to predations from within; there's something hauntingly viral about the decade's prime financial fad, the leveraged buyout. Predicated on using the assets of a targeted company to finance its own takeover, such hostile deals purport to be efficiency-driven—bringing stock prices up to the company's "real" value. But it's a good bet such financial killings will ultimately have dire consequences—injuring the body of the economy for short-term gain.

In far less malign ways, '80s pop music also manifests this felonious impulse. Using electronic samplers, hip-hop and other modern dance music surgically lift funky bits from previous recordings by the likes of James Brown and P-Funk's George Clinton. These electronic soul gleanings are then replicated, looped and remixed with other sounds into aural collage.

Although less techno on the surface of things, mainstream pop is no less derivative. Madonna's relentlessly formulaic songs (not to mention her games of cinema sex-goddess musical chairs) constantly skate between cliché and plagiarism. Her recent song "Express Yourself" is a blatant lift from the Staple Singers' hit "Respect Yourself," though she would doubtless characterize it as a homage. Delete her sexual charades, and Elvis Costello is working the same cliché-strewn side of the street—though with a sharper tongue and a more agile melodic sense. Clearly, it's often hard to determine where influence becomes infringement.

Other legally sanctioned forms of commercial soul travel abounded in the '80s. In the wake of *The Big Chill* soundtrack, soul music sold more products than John House-

Backing into the future: pop's the question in the decade that wasn't

man and Bill Cosby put together. Retro rock clubs and oldies stations capitalized on the trend. Sixties songs, on the way to becoming a retrofitted commodity, were stripped of any controversy or, god forbid, ethnicity. After all, what was being celebrated wasn't a time in history; it was the time of your life. And time, as you may remember from school, is money.

Corporate rock rolls on: In some respects those melodic angst-meisters, the Buzzcocks, were the quintessential '80s band. They broke up at the top of the decade (creating some very-'80s negative space) only to re-form recently to make some money (also très '80s). Musicians who *didn't* abstain found themselves playing rock in a hard place. The Replacements, for instance, were

CULTURE

a great rugged pop band, yet few beyond the critics cared. Their song "Bastards of Young" epitomized the pathos of a youth culture stranded by shifting demographics. In spite of waning interest in aggressive rock, Dead Kennedys, Hüsker Dü, Minutemen, Meat Puppets and a host of younger bands helped keep an alternative "thrash" subculture going for years.

And despite acres of sexism and the usual sleazy record biz B.S., female-centered groups such as the Pretenders, the Go-Gos, the Bangles and Throwing Muses secured a foothold in the mainstream. Not to mention Madonna. The times they were a-changin', but slowly.

Bruce Springsteen even learned a thing or two about the intrinsic limits of top-40 radio when his "Born in the USA" became a hit single. Much to Springsteen's chagrin, his Vietnam-vet anti-anthem was misinterpreted as a patriotic ditty—perhaps this was because the phrase "born in the USA" occurs 137 times in 3½ minutes. Repetition works, as ad weasels know—and sometimes it works against you. Even the Boss' boss, CBS, got hung out to dry in the stop-and-go '80s marketplace. Not by Springsteen, who moved millions of units of product whenever he got around to putting out a record, but by shortsighted management intent on a star-crossed blockbuster strategy. The company, in order to maximize short-term profits, concentrated its promotional efforts on high-return superstars like Springsteen, Dylan and Michael Jackson.

The Warner Bros. octopus, in contrast, was flinging smaller wads of cash every which way toward promising youngsters and established stars. When consumer whims shifted, Warner's profitable ass was well covered. With independent record labels and distribution networks hitting hard times in the '80s, it's nice to see diversity carry the day—if only on the basis of profitability. And regardless of your opinion of current popular styles such as rap and house music, you've got to love how it disrupts the biz. Periodic musical upheavals like late-'80s commercial hip-hop (and late-'70s anti-commercial punk) ensure industry turnover, because execs will hit the street one way or the

other—either looking for work, or finding acts.

Another curious '80s agent of musical diversity has been MTV, which now verges on head-banger hegemony. MTV does hype its twice-daily *Yo! MTV Raps* program, and its weekly underground music shows offer up a wider variety of music than you'll find on all but a few big-city radio stations. For most of the hours of the day, however, the operative question remains: Who put the "empty" in MTV?

The Tom Wolfe decade: In the late '60s and '70s Tom Wolfe helped invent "the new journalism," a reportage hybrid form rife with novelistic devices such as first-person narratives and impressionistic interior monologues. While Wolfe's talent was undisputed, some grumbled that his novel approach to reporting was too novelistic—he had to be making it up. Wolfe wisely ignored 'em and kept on typing. In the early '80s Wolfe served up his best work: the hilarious, if one-sided, polemic, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, as well as his best-selling paean to test pilots, *The Right Stuff*.

Wolfe finally made the crossover to fiction proper in the late '80s with another best seller, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Yet, according to my informal survey (I talked to my friends), Wolfe's amazingly detailed chronicle of contemporary New York is the decade's most half-read book. The common complaint: now that Wolfe was making it up, it sounded too much like *journalism*.

Kitchen-sinkism in dodge city: Postmodernism, the catch phrase that's really a Catch-22, resisted analysis for the entire decade. Not exactly a mental illness, postmodernism is more of a wearying syndrome whose symptoms may include: parched wit, pervasive irony, aggressive self-reference, recycling of cultural icons, juxtaposition

Now that it's Morning After in America, it's clear that cheap nostalgia is bought at the price of a clouded vision.

posing as commentary, historical anachronisms, shifting contexts, breakdowns of genre boundaries and distinctions between high and low art—and a pinch of salt.

Also known as kitchen-sinkism, postmodernism has attained mystic ineffable status on a par with the NBA illegal-defense rule and the concept of genuine draft beer in a can. PoMo, as it is affectionately known, has penetrated the mass consciousness to the point where smart-alecky 12-year-olds have been writing to newspaper columnists with questions like, "If we can put a man on the moon, why can't we define postmodernism?" (It's a trick question, of course. The correct answer is: "We haven't put any men on the moon since before you were born, kid; we got enough problems getting 'em into orbit. Now scram!")

To solve this problem once and for all, I

offer the following multiple-choice question: What is postmodernism?

A) The important sound of things falling apart;

B) A right-wing plot intended to divert left-wing graduate students from useful work—a kind of human computer virus;

C) A left-wing plot to ensure that left-wing graduate students won't reproduce—a kind of human computer virus;

D) You're at this really wild rent party, see, at this guy Modernism's loft, when at midnight you announce, "Modernism's rent party is now over; postmodernism's rent party has begun—pay up, suckers!"

Answer: all of the above or none of the above—and that's the Catch-22.

Less is more, more or less: Paradoxically (which was a great '80s way to start a sentence), even as the pseudopods of postmodernism slimed across the intellectual landscape, the icy aesthetic of minimalism had its stolen moments of conceptual triumph. Among others who played out this impulse toward pop minimalism, you had the choice of comatose cutup Steven Wright, art-rock aural wallpaper consultant Brian Eno and glacial-drift classical composer Philip Glass. You might also add your favorite annoying singer-songwriter to the list.

But the most popular manifestation of the minimal may be *Late Night with David Letterman*. The usual talk-show bogus hominess goes out the window when Letterman comes on screen. The awkward, often surly, host opens with a monologue that is a comedic black hole containing four collapsed jokes. This is a talk show about talk-show-ness, you'll pardon the expression.

Some knock Letterman for not gnawing harder on the GE hand that feeds him. But at the very least Dave often points out that "those pinheads at GE" are fronting the dough for the air time he squanders in such features as "Hal Gurney's Network Time Killers." All this overlooks the fact that the show is occasionally brilliant, and always adventurous by TV standards. Just as often, however, I find I turn it off in disgust, which isn't all bad and is very postmodern.

Black goes with everything; everything falls apart: In the world of fashion, black, like suicide, was the coward's way out. Which isn't to say that it wasn't sometimes the best option. Simply everybody was wearing black. And though most justified the choice on the familiar grounds of "hides dirt" and "goes with anything," something else was going on as well.

Indeed, everywhere you looked it appeared to be Mourning in America. The sense of vague, undifferentiated loss was vogue. For a portion of the young—posed in the petulant torpor of post-punk, shopping-mall nihilism—it may have seemed that the future was history. And for nostalgic baby-boomers—that self-obsessed pig in the demographic python, and looking quite chic, thank you—it may have appeared that their history was the future. Or maybe all that black just signified the nascent awareness that nobody was in charge.

The garment-biz gurus certainly weren't

pulling the levers anymore. The fashion cartel and their glam-media lapdogs had little luck dictating hemlines or anything else. Paradoxically, the only thing new was retro. Paisley, preppie, post-punk, Prince—and that's just the "Ps"—it all came back. Fashion bulimia. Very, very postmodern.

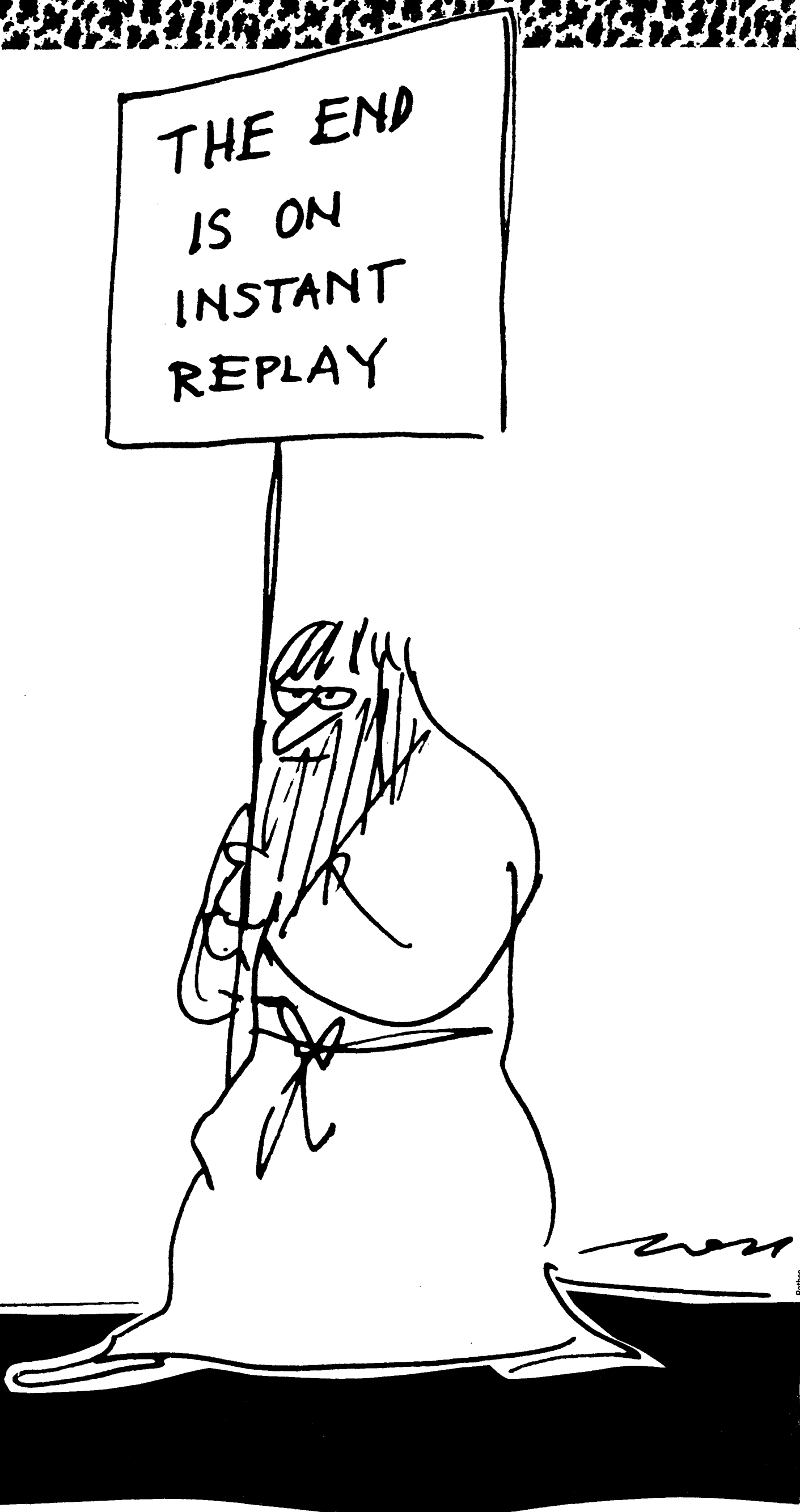
Since there was no consensus about what the past truly was, ideas of what constituted retro landed all over the map. Given the decade's conservative drift, it's not surprising that that enduring American type, the prepie look, came back strong. In a similar throwback fashion, denim remained the uniform of youth—albeit in a clutch of new market niches, upscale and down. Infantile was in as the late-'70s "Annie Hall" look mutated into a vintage-attic mode that suggested nothing so much as spoiled children playing at adulthood. Oversized watches and big, clunky jewelry heightened the effect.

Even as some worked at recapturing a smidgen of childhood innocence, Nancy Reagan was dressing for the job she wanted: empress. Nancita's to-die frocks might have seemed less obscene if the streets of L.A. weren't littered with real fashion fatalities—gang members slain for wearing the wrong color of plaid shirt.

Despite the yawning chasm between rich and poor, the two were oddly united for me by the one '80s fashion trend with scant retro content: the swollen logo. It may be the wave of the future. Once upon a time, you'll recall, designers put their marks on the inside of garments, or perhaps stitched a tasteful penguin or polo player somewhere unobtrusive. As the '80s wore on, however, these logos got bigger and bigger—like an oncoming train. They appeared first, primarily, on well-off young whites who wore them as endorsements for upscale brands. Almost overnight these bloated logos became "a black thing," a deft (and def) ironic commentary of a minimalist sort. I remember I smiled appreciatively the first time I saw a rail-thin homeless black man sleeping in a doorway wearing a sullied Gucci T-shirt. But this implied stab at the fashion powers that be was a small joke indeed. A trophy of wealth; an atrophy of the self.

The end of this story: Sometime in the '70s I heard a record by avant-garde jazz great Sun Ra on which he repeatedly intoned, "It's after the end of the world, don't you know that yet?" At first these words were blank dada to me—a catch phrase for a product that could never exist. Over the years, however, I learned the meaning of these words, or imagined I had. My version goes something like this: once we realize we have the ability to unmake ourselves (as with the Bomb), the world begins again.

Maybe in the spirit of Sun Ra, then, it would be best to declare the '90s dead on arrival and get on with the afterlife where we can all do as we please—maybe even make the world a better place. ☐



HISTORY

Annual reports: storied histories and sorted tales

By Jeremiah Creedon

MANY OLDER AMERICANS LAMENT THAT the young today have such a dim sense of the nation's history. A spreading ignorance about the past is said to be more proof that the public education system is collapsing from within, which may be true. But external forces may also be at work, making history more and more difficult to teach.

For one thing, no one puts much stock in official history anymore—that is, the simple historical narratives that once found their way onto cereal boxes or the placemats in national chain restaurants. Public officials must take some blame for this loss of faith: any historical account offered by a public or corporate official now has all the credibility of the latest alibi from a repeat offender. In an age when graduate students training for careers in civil service attend seminars on how to dissemble and prevaricate, it makes sense that the populace would learn to disbelieve as a matter of course.

The effect of this distrust on the public mind has been significant. This struck me in 1983, when I overheard two drunken men debating why the Soviets shot down the Korean Air

Lines Flight 007. "The truth exists, but we don't know the truth," one man said, and the accidental profundity in his comment stunned them both into silence.

Official doublespeak is not the only force that has been breaking down the common sense of history. Both physics and literature have independently asserted their own convictions that all narrators are unreliable. The awareness that objectivity is an illusion can also be detected on the cultural plane, where suddenly everyone is asserting a legitimate right to tell history from their own ethnic, social, gendered or geographic perspectives.

It could also be argued that energies once invested in ordering the past into neat linear narratives are now diffused laterally—into the more immediate task of understanding a complex, non-linear, all-encompassing global present. Maybe students no longer see much resemblance between the image of American life an older generation wishes to imbue in them and the image they're assembling for themselves from other sources.

This possibility was suggested to me by a teacher at an inner-city high school, who was amazed at how little his students knew about the country's role in the Vietnam War. A few weeks later, after the radiation leak at Cher-

nobyl in 1986, he was equally amazed to see them diagram from memory the basic process of a nuclear meltdown on the blackboard—a concept they had learned with little effort from graphics displays on television.

The human impulse to order reality into a narrative remains strong, but the stories that Americans tell themselves have less in common now. My own idiosyncratic history of the '80s can be found below. The first step in compiling it—from various news snippets and other readings—was to identify the moment when the era began. Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in November 1980 would serve well enough, but so would the death of child psychologist Jean Piaget some weeks earlier.

In studying the stages of human neurological development, Piaget discovered a pattern to the way children gradually gave up "animistic" explanations, replacing them with a sense of cause and effect, space, time and logic. He also theorized that it took eight years for a child to develop an awareness of "moral realism." A sophisticated knowledge of human motive and duplicity first appears at this age. In other words, a child born on the day Piaget died or Reagan was elected is only now beginning to understand that what someone says about history may not be true—for any number of reasons.

1981

The Year of Sweeping Assertions

On Sept. 28, 1981, President Reagan unveiled his plan for fighting crime to an international conference of police chiefs in New Orleans. The address became a centerpiece in the administration's effort to establish an official philosophy of human nature. Spreading this vision fell to the president's like-minded disciples, including Interior Secretary James Watt, Budget Director David Stockman and the rest of the Reagan Cabinet. The lesson: human nature *does* change, depending on who controls the national microphone.

So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts. But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distributions of property.

—James Madison, *Federalist Paper No. 10* (1788)

It's obvious that prosperity doesn't decrease crime—just as it's obvious that deprivation and want don't necessarily increase crime.

—Ronald Reagan

In order that the originality of the idealist whose dreams transcend his century may find expression, it is necessary that the originality of the criminal, who is below the level of his time, shall also be possible. One does not occur without the other.

—Emile Durheim, *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895)

Men are basically good but prone to evil, and society has a right to be protected from them. Only our deep moral values and strong social institutions can hold back that jungle and restrain the darker impulses of human nature.

—Ronald Reagan

I was told often enough what was bad, but I was never given a substitute or the opportunity to try another world until I had already become so defiant and twisted I no longer cared about someone else's right or wrong... I had some help in becoming the person I am. Yes, I resent the system!

—Charles Manson, with Nuel Emmons, *Manson in His Own Words* (1986)

The solution to the crime problem will not be found in the social worker's files, the psychiatrist's notes or the bureaucrat's budget; it's a problem of the human heart, and it's where we must look for the answer.

—Ronald Reagan

Your law is but the will of your class exalted into statutes.

—Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

1982

The Year of the Cordoned Wilderness

In 1981, naturalists discovered a colony of blackfooted ferrets living on the Wyoming prairie, long after the animal had been declared extinct. The news came as some consolation for environmentalists, who were trying to control the rampant spread of another Wyoming native, Interior Secretary James Watt. Watt spent 1982 proposing one wilderness leasing policy after another. His goal was to expand oil and gas drilling along the American coastline and increase mining in federally controlled lands.

Though driven from his post in 1983, Watt remains an important figure in the history of the decade, for he embodies a major contradiction in the Reagan philosophy that dominated these years. A conservative Christian who mixed biblical pronouncements with the don't-tread-on-me maxim of the American West, Watt actually furthered a successful federal campaign against individual rights. This assault upon the individual would prove to be as profound, though not as well recognized, as the Reagan administration's sustained disregard for the environment.

We have put into wilderness about 80 million acres of land, and we've never properly inventoried them. We don't know what minerals are there. We don't know what energy potential is there, and right now the United States is vulnerable to a natural resources attack or war.

—James Watt

It is much easier to explain to the American people why we have oil rigs off our coasts than it would be to explain to the mothers and fathers of this land why their sons are fighting on the sands of the Middle East, as might be required if the policies of our critics were to be pursued.

—James Watt

1983

The Year of the One-Man Stand

That the lone American was doomed in his private war against modernity was revealed in two well-publicized last stands: the death-watch over artificial heart recipient Barney Clark and the manhunt for militant right-wing tax protester Gordon Kahl.

Official double-speak is not the only force that has been breaking down the common sense of history.

Lionized in the press as a "rugged old Rocky Mountain sagebrush," Clark spent his final days as a technological marionette suspended above death by tubes and wires. Clark struggled throughout the ordeal not only to save his life but to retain his dignity. The word after his death in March was that the mechanical heart remained in "perfect shape." For all his courage, it was the man who had disappointed the machine.

In February, Gordon Kahl, a retired farmer and member of the Posse Comitatus, fatally shot two federal agents at a North Dakota roadblock. For several months he eluded a federal dragnet that seemed destined at first to capture nothing but the public imagination. He died in June when a gunfight with the law ignited the Arkansas farmhouse where he was hiding—a fiery end he shared with other American antiheroes, including John Wilkes Booth, the Symbionese Liberation Army and the MOVE cult in Philadelphia. Dental records were used to confirm that the charred remains were really Kahl's. It was an ironic fate for a man obsessed with the federal government's invasion of his privacy. Even in death, Kahl was striped of the only real uniqueness a common person can secure in the information age: the unique identity of the unidentified.

John Chapman (1774-1845), also known as Johnny Appleseed. He was born in Massachusetts. From Pennsylvania to Ohio, beginning in 1800, he sowed apple seeds for over 40 years, and wandered Ohio, Indiana, West Pennsylvania, visiting his forest nurseries. "His rugged dress, eccentric ways and religious turn of mind attracted attention."

—The Columbia Encyclopedia

Cardiognosis: Literally "knowledge of the heart," the special charism that God confers on some people, as recorded in the lives of the saints, to know the moral and spiritual condition of a person without self-manifestation. As an extraordinary supernatural gift, it must be distinguished from the psychological phenomenon of being able to shrewdly estimate someone's minimal external evidence.

—The Modern Catholic Dictionary

1984

The Year of the Assassinated Yin

A few days before America's first woman candidate for vice president, Geraldine Ferraro, would see her ticket defeated at the polls, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was shot and killed by her own bodyguards. Her death followed the murder of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat while reviewing his own troops in 1981 and assassination attempts earlier that year against President Reagan and Pope John Paul II. Gandhi's body was cremated on a pyre of sandalwood. Many were killed by rampaging mobs when it became known that members of India's Sikh minority were responsible for her death.

Yin: In Chinese philosophy, the passive, negative, feminine force or principle in the universe; it is always both contrasted with and complementary to the yang.

—Webster's New World Dictionary

The assumption of women of executive, industrial and cultural power has not, up to the present time, radically changed the nature of this power. This can be clearly seen in the East, where women promoted to decision-making positions suddenly obtain the

economic as well as the narcissistic advantages refused them for thousands of years and become ... the most zealous protectors of the established order.

—French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" (1979)

I have found women in power far more fascinating than men because they are simpler, not self-conscious at all, quiet with a great sense of responsibility.... I blindly believe women would be better administrators than men.

—Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci

As women move into positions of influence, they are attempting to effect change. The Body Image Council, a group of visible women in fashion, cosmetics, advertising and dance, have joined forces to speak out against images of women that promote unhealthy ideals.

Vogue magazine (October 1988)

1985

The Year of Invisible Realities

Any year in the '80s could be chosen to mark a changing popular sense of the physical universe. Nuclear accidents in 1986 at Chernobyl and in Brazil, where hundreds were contaminated by a radioactive capsule left in an abandoned clinic, were proof enough that reality went beyond what the human animal could see or smell. The spread of the microscopic HIV retrovirus was a grim reiteration. Meanwhile, advances in gene mapping and recombinant genetics promised both medical miracles and new challenges to personal dignity.

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

—Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence (1776)

We begin by acknowledging some of those permanent things, those absolute truths I mentioned before.

—Ronald Reagan

In 1927 Heisenberg enunciated his principle of indeterminacy, which asserts that limitations inherent in nature prohibit the determinations of both the position and the velocity of the particle.

—The Columbia Encyclopedia, on quantum theory

Although even physicists still have difficulty understanding the theory, superstrings may be thought of as one-dimensional bits of energy measuring a billionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a centimeter in length.... Depending on how the strings are vibrating and rotating, they can represent any of the known particles of matter.

Time magazine, "Hanging the Universe on Strings" (January 1986)

Think of it as an enormously wide band of luminous filaments, luminous strings with no end.... The total world is made up of the 48 bands.... The world that our assemblage point assembles for our normal perceptions is made up of two bands.

—Carlos Castaneda, The Fire from Within (1984)

Gene transplantations by microinjection into the egg cell is not designed for human gene therapy.... If a bad effect appears after an animal transplant, the experiments can be halted. If the same thing were to happen after a human

germline transplant, the harmful gene combination would be out in the world beyond recall.

New York Times, "Manipulating Codes in the Gene Lab" (January 1986)

1986

The Year of Celestial Omens

The new year began with astronomers and the press eagerly awaiting the return of Halley's comet, despite its long history as a portent of disaster. It seemed that civilization had finally devised a way to intercept this errant bit of cosmic matter and to subdue it with scientific reason. But for America, this triumph was not to be. In January, the space shuttle Challenger was destroyed only seconds after embarking on its "Spartan-Halley" research mission. That evening President Reagan postponed his annual address on the state of the union, deferring to the gods, who had given their own. Like a flagship sinking in a sudden squall at the mouth of its home port, the shuttle became a dark omen for the endeavor it symbolized: America's conquest of "the final frontier."

The shuttle could hardly have got off the pad without military support.... In exchange for this crucial backing, the space agency was compelled to change the shuttle's design, vastly complicating the job of building it.

—Time magazine (April 1981)

Comets have triggered religious massacres, political purges, wars, mass psychosis and, in this century, a work stoppage by farm laborers. Beyond the disasters engineered by our own folly, comets have been blamed for virtually every kind of catastrophe that has befallen mankind.

—Douglas Campbell & John Higgins, Tales of the Comet (1986)

The catastrophes of history, by which God punishes pride, are the natural and inevitable consequences of man's effort to transcend his mortal existence and to establish a security to which man has no right.

—Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (1943)

The most closely guarded secret of the Reagan White House.

—That astrology had been used to schedule major presidential events, according to former White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan (1988)

The evolutionary goal of our species is to escape this planet before the sun explodes. —French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, speaking at the University of Minnesota (1987)

What do these satellites and rockets do for simple mortals like me? To devil with them and the moon for a while, and give me a better dinner instead.

—A reader's letter to the Soviet newspaper Pravda (June 1960)

1987

The Year of Clouded Effluences

Beyond freedom and dignity there is urinalysis—if not life in general in the cities of the American West.

Aside from being the nation's ski capital and a major airline hub, Denver, Colo., is an environmental apocalypse waiting to happen. Defense concerns like aerospace giant Martin Marietta and the nuclear arms facility at Rocky Flats have already polluted the area's water. With Denver's propensity for atmospheric inversions—smog layers that blanket the city for days on end—one could imagine a radioactive leak causing some serious havoc.

Like James Watt, who found an early power base there, Denver epitomizes the great contradiction that was inherent in Reaganism. The modern assault on personal liberty, furthered by a president who was elected on a promise of "less government," is all the more glaring in a city that is so proud of its roots in the Old West. In Denver and elsewhere, government contractors are among the first to test employees for drug use, and yet their own waste goes unmonitored, even as it destroys the nation's land and water.

Rockwell International, which operates Rocky Flats, instituted a preemployment drug-testing policy about 18 months ago. When the testing first began ... about 7 percent of the applicants were knocked out of consideration. The rate has since dropped to about 3 percent.

—Westword magazine (November 1986)

Some 2,300 sources of hazardous and radioactive wastes have been detected at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant, according to the Colorado Department of Health. The volume of those sources is almost eight times the 300 waste sources that officials expected to find at the plant northwest of Denver.

—Denver Post (November 1986)

At Martin Marietta, prospective employees are screened for drugs and alcohol. In cases where substance abuse is suspected, the employee is asked to go to the medical department, where he is required to provide a urine sample.

—Westword (November 1986)

Since 1956, operations at the Martin Marietta (Marietta Aerospace) facility have left extremely high levels of contamination in the land and soil.... Solvent-related and potential cancer-causing contaminants also have been found in the groundwater of adjacent land, owned by the Denver Water Board and the site of the Kassler Water Treatment Plant.

—Denver Post (August 1986)

1988

The Year of the Semiotic Jihad

In 1987 the televised trials of Oliver North and Robert Bork delivered a common verdict: the old American style of representative democracy no longer purely existed. A new mutant system had taken over—one where a centralized political elite sought to justify its behavior by citing the support of public opinion, even as it manufactured public opinion. Central to this new order was the network camera, which turned every action, person and object into a symbol. Everyone stood for something larger; nothing was merely itself.

The liberals appeared to learn something from Ollie North about orchestrating signs and symbols, then used the lesson to render

Continued on page 22

IN THESE TIMES NOVEMBER 1-7, 1989 19

Slaves to the market: cultural death by consumption

By Pat Aufderheide

AS THE MULTIBILLION-DOLLAR COMPANIES that sell us reality-in-a-package charge into the '90s, the magic word "marketing" is the key to understanding our infotainment future. But being reduced to a market segment leaves many of us vaguely discontented. And as we look back to the '80s entertainment movies, we can see the massaging of our discontent.

By the end of the '80s, we had become a nation not just of consumers but of the consumed. Delicious demographic morsels. The audience is, of course, the ultimate product delivered to advertisers on "free" media like radio and TV, as well as in media sold below cost, like newspapers, magazines and cable.

But we are ever less dependable. Network TV viewers split off for cable and videocassette. Newspaper readership has declined

since the heydays of Hearst and Pulitzer. The readers that remain are often grazing in lifestyle, fashion and health sections. Magazine readers, offered an explosion of special-interest magazines, switch loyalties and subscriptions with the latest offer of a free calculator.

Calling the shots: National advertisers, in a power position, are taking aim at content, the sea in which their ads swim. And they're not being subtle. You can perhaps see it most boldly in television, the most expensive, high impact, ad site.

• On September 24, *Ancient Forests: Rage over Trees*, an Audubon Society documentary on forests in the Pacific Northwest, was aired on the Turner Broadcasting System without ads. Ford, Dean Witter Reynolds and Strohm pulled their ads when logging interests protested.

• Federal Express pulled its ads on all ABC

stations and affiliates last month after an item on the ABC news show *20/20* charged that Federal Express shipped explosives and sensitive documents for the U.S. Defense Department without proper safeguards.

• NBC's docudrama *Roe vs. Wade* was finally aired last spring without ads from several major sponsors who preferred to avoid controversy.

In each case, television executives stuck by their programs, hollering about professional integrity. But such demonstrations of advertiser strength have a "chilling effect" on editors and producers. And we'll never know what we're not getting.

Masters of the universe: Ad muscle also works in subtler ways to determine what we won't see. For instance, Bob Keeshan—Captain Kangaroo—was bumped off commercial television in the '80s. TV executives had traded the low-profit market in educational kids' programming for cheap syndicated shows and toy-related schlock. (Toy-linked shows, basically long-form advertisements, have proliferated. There were 13 in the early '80s, when they became legal; there are 70 now.) Public TV extended a welcome to Captain Kangaroo—if he'd raise his own funds. Ever since, he's been beating the bushes for funders, without success.

Meanwhile, the media corporations themselves are becoming gigantic marketing

THE BIZ

machines. Time-Warner, the new 2,000-pound gorilla on the block, can now cross-market its wares in books and magazines and on network TV, cable and videocassettes. Sony, the new owner of Columbia Pictures, is already slaving at the idea of finally having a software library to drive its hardware sales; no more Betamax embarrassments for the emperor of silicon chips. With movie studios buying theaters and phone companies pushing to enter the cable industry and sell information on their own lines, vertical integration proceeds on all fronts.

Whittle Communications, now 50 percent owned by Time-Warner, is giving us a small taste of our information future. Like a good entrepreneur, Chris Whittle has seen the future, and it is in marketing and conglomeration. After his commercial-TV-in-the-schools venture, which followed on his advertiser-sponsored posters in schools and magazines in doctors' offices, Whittle is now hot on what the *Wall Street Journal* calls "the most blatant attempt yet by a magazine to custom-make a demographically correct audience for its advertisers." The new Whittle magazine series, called "Families of the World," will be launched with a shopping mall exhibit, product sampling, sweepstakes and local contests. The marketing is all in place; the editorial content has yet to be conceived.

Whittle is also into book publishing, each book sponsored by one advertiser. The venture has already run into a form of advertiser censorship with a strange twist: Federal Express refused to sponsor a book whose subject—praise for junk-bond king Michael Milken—would look too compromising. Fed Ex, after all, is buying the appearance of ethics.

So, in the '90s, if Federal Express, or Ford, or Tambrands, will back a project, you'll probably get it. And if you don't think you want it,

Time-Warner, Sony or Whittle will try to convince you that you do.

But if you want something more, then you'll have to go to desktop publishing (except that bookstores don't carry those books), or turn to cable access (if your cable system is among that one-tenth of the systems that has it), or subscribe to an "alternative" newspaper (but don't expect the *New York Times* to take it seriously).

Opinion management: It has never been clear how the public is supposed to ensure that the media serve the public interest—without giving the government censorship power. Limiting cross-ownership and restricting conglomeration—tried-and-true techniques, mostly abolished in the Reagan era—are excellent options. But broadcast industry deregulation and rapid economic change in the communications industries in the '80s have gutted the very notion of the media's public-service function. And the conglomerates have done their best to make the idea that the public has rights regarding the public spectrum sound positively un-American.

• The Gannett company's foundation money hosts dozens of workshops and conferences and sponsors grants dedicated to professionalizing journalists, as well as exploring the puzzling question of why the public has less faith than ever before in the media. Meanwhile, Gannett's 90-plus newspaper chain, its national daily *USA Today* and its TV and radio stations serve up the kind of guaranteed-sterile info-packaging that turns journalism into mental fast food.

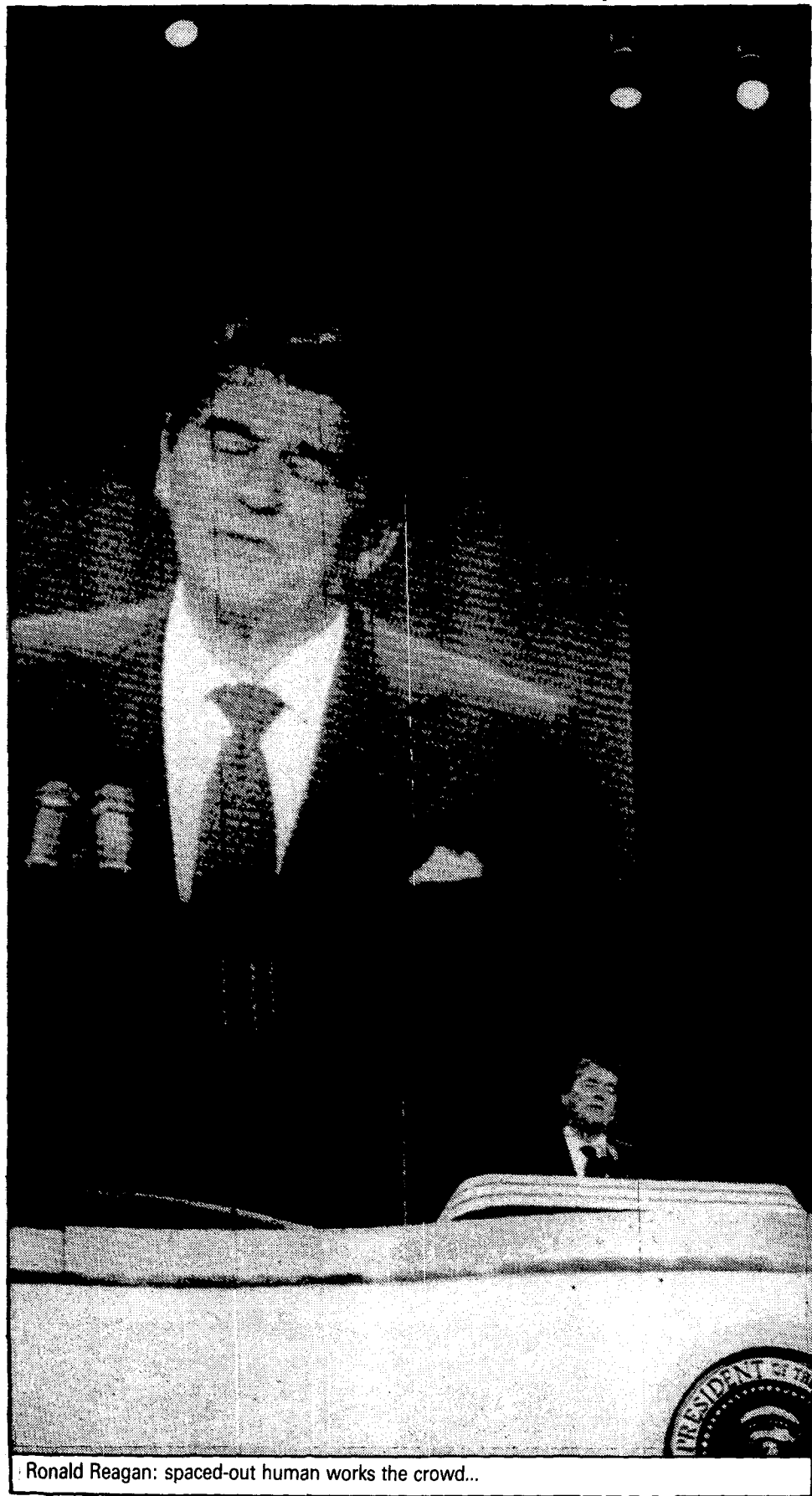
• The leaders of the American Newspaper Publishers Association, conglomerate cross-owners themselves, shamelessly lobby for deregulation and use the editorial pages of their newspapers to carry the battle to the public. Try to find a chain or conglomerate-owned newspaper, for instance, that hasn't published an editorial against the Fairness Doctrine, which applies only to broadcasting.

• The media congloms take their case to the public in advocacy ads, such as the Times-Mirror series "The People and the Press" ("We're interested in what you think"). The company-sponsored opinion polls that fueled

**By the end of the '80s,
we had become a nation
not just of consumers
but of the consumed.
The audience is the
ultimate product.**

the ads ask questions that have more to do with marketing (e.g., does the public trust the media?) than with the public interest. Yet these polls are represented as a public service by a media organization eager to show its responsibility.

With this shaping of the climate of opinion and legislative options, it's little wonder that Reagan-era deregulation so easily removed barriers to conglomeration and cross-ownership. It also removed many of the rules telling broadcasters how to serve the public interest. (This is an area where the government can enforce public service because broadcasters



Ronald Reagan: spaced-out human works the crowd...

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Annual reports

Continued from page 19

Robert Bork a signifier of all things un-American. But the 1988 presidential campaign revealed this semiotic shrewdness on the left as a fluke. For all the left-wing media theorists that populate the American academy, it is the Republican right that has turned the esoteric study of semiotics into a tactical weapon.

Some credit must go to the immensely popular former president, a man who began his political career only after he had mastered the language of the camera.

I'm for clean water; I like clean water.

—George Bush (October 1988)

The peculiar characteristics of mind in the chief actor have ... a high importance. From an imaginative, flighty, inexperienced head, and from a calm, sagacious understanding, different things are to be expected.

—Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (1832)

Through you, we feel as giants once again.

—Ronald Reagan, to the first shuttle astronauts (1981)

1989: The Year of the Beginning of the End:

The end of a decade has become a cultural device, an arbitrary place to close one historical file and open another. The end of the current decade may have more than the usual symbolic significance, for it marks the last such marker before the advent of the millennium in the year 2000. In 1989, one can already

hear voices raising the cry that the end is near—and feel the allure in such prophecy as well. It may only be a rehearsal for the chiliaric dread that could soon sweep Western society, which lacks the Eastern faith that beyond the end waits another beginning.

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.

—State Department Deputy Director Francis Fukuyama in his essay "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Summer 1989)

Changes that can affect us can happen in our lifetime in our world—not just changes like wars but bigger and more sweeping events. I believe that without recognizing it we have already stepped over the threshold of such a change: that we are at the end of nature.

—Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (1989)

Hexagram 64, Before the End: "The idea of rebirth here is a key to the meaning of the I Ching as a whole. The book ends with a new beginning, cycling back to the first hexagram, Creative Power, forever and ever into eternity."

—R.L. Wing, in his translation of the *I Ching*, or *Chinese Book of Changes* (1982)

Jeremiah Creedon is a writer and critic living in Minneapolis.

Black America

Continued from page 6

ground; and writers Toni Morrison, Trey Ellis, Lisa Jones, August Wilson and George Wolfe. While these individuals all have distinctive takes on the new black aesthetic, they share a similar sensibility.

All are self-confidently middle class and secure about their blackness. They "no longer need to deny or suppress any part of our complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural baggage to please either white people or black," writes Trey Ellis in a manifesto published in the May 1989 issue of *Before Columbus Review*. "The culturally mulatto Cosby girls are equally as black as a black teenage welfare mother." These cultural pioneers are equally at home parodying some of the more absurd aspects of movements past or imagining new pluralistic vistas. "There is now such a strong and vast body of great black work that the corny or mediocre doesn't need to be coddled," Ellis adds. "NBA [new black aesthetic] artists aren't afraid to publicly flout the official,

positivist black party line."

Cornel West is flouting the party line in academia. His prodigious output of critical writing is recasting the image of the black academic, and since he is also a theologian-minister, his radical critiques are being heard in African-Americans' most popular forum, the black church. In a scathing article on the general crisis of black leadership in the February 1989 issue of *Zeta Magazine*, West, a philosophy professor and chairman of the African-American studies department at Princeton University, pilloried current black leadership. "There has not been a time in the history of black people in this country when the quantity of politicians and intellectuals was so great, yet the quality of both groups has been so low. Just when one would have guessed that black America was flexing its political and intellectual muscles, rigor mortis seems to have set in." West blames this crisis on the "tame and genteel face of the black middle class."

That genteel face undoubtedly adorns the program director of the Chicago station that boasts about playing "no rap." □

C A L E N D A R

ALBANY, CA November 5

Use the Calendar to announce conferences, lectures, films, events, etc. The cost is **\$25.00 for one insertion, \$35.00 for two insertions** and **\$15.00 for each additional insert**, for copy of 50 words or less (additional words are 50¢ each). Payment must accompany your announcement, and should be sent to the attention of **ITT Calendar**.

Join Women Empowering Women (WE WOMEN) and Tradeswoman, Inc., at our first annual "Celebrate Women in the Trades" brunch, 11:30 a.m. at the Albany Veterans Memorial Building in Albany. This is the first opportunity in California for tradeswomen, advocates and the community to publicly celebrate the pioneer spirit and valuable contributions of the many women who have entered the trades in the last 10-15 years. Crisco Skidmore McCullough, a longtime teacher and trainer in non-traditional work for women, will be the guest speaker. The event will include great food and music for all. The brunch is a benefit for Tradeswomen, Inc., and Women Empowering Women, two Bay Area organizations with national memberships. The event is wheelchair accessible, and childcare is provided by advance reservation only. Call Judy at (415) 525-7645 for information and reservations.

NEW YORK November 2-7

THE NEW YORK MARXIST SCHOOL CLASS AND AMERICAN TRADE UNIONS; Frank Annunziato, George Demartino—Rethinking Marxism; Thursday, Nov. 2; 8 p.m.; \$5. ECOLOGY, REFORM & REVOLUTION; Neftali Garcia, Richard Lewontin; Friday, Nov. 3; 8 p.m.; \$5. PERFORMANCE: TOPICAL TAP; Jane Goldberg, Sarah Safford; Saturday, Nov. 4; 8 p.m. and Sunday, Nov. 5; 6 p.m.; \$10. SOCIALISM AS A GLOBAL SYSTEM; Bill Tabb; Tuesday, Nov. 7; 6 p.m.; \$5.

All events take place at the New York Marxist School, 79 Leonard St., New York, NY 10013, (212) 941-0332.

CHICAGO, IL November 3

"Perestroika and the Future of Socialism," a forum sponsored by Solidarity; with Alexander Amerisov, editor of *Soviet-American Review*; Milton Fisk, philosophy professor, Indiana University (lectured in the Soviet Union this summer); and Mel Rothenberg, contributor to *The Guardian*, will be held at 7 p.m., 3309 N. Seminary. For information, call (312) 275-8937.

BALTIMORE, MD November 10

"Toward the Nineties and Beyond." DSA public meeting featuring Cornel West, journalist Robert Kuttner and others at 8 p.m. at the Baltimore Hilton, 1726 Reisterstown Road, Pikesville (Exit 20 off Beltway). \$3 admission. For more info: DSA, 15 Dutch St., New York, NY 10038, (212) 962-0390.

November 10-12

1989 National Convention of the Democratic Socialists of America at the Baltimore Hilton, 1726 Reisterstown Road, with plenaries, workshops on domestic and international politics featuring Irving Howe, Barbara Ehrenreich, Cornel West, James Farmer and others. More information: DSA, 15 Dutch St., New York, NY 10038, (212) 962-0390.

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The Human Economic Appalachian Development Co. (HEAD) seeks a MANAGER for the Central Appalachian Peoples FCU (CAPFCU), a community development credit union. CAPFCU is a regional cooperative, based in Berea, Kentucky. Experience: exposure to social-change organizations, administration, accounting and commitment to working with low-income people. \$15-17K + benefits. Resumes to: Search Committee, P.O. Box 504, Berea, KY 40403. Questions: Miriam Ellard, (606) 986-8423. Deadline: 12 30 89.

National Trade Union Newspaper seeks two skilled people with labor or related organizational background for the following full-time positions: GRAPHIC DESIGNER. Responsibilities include paste-up and mechanicals of bimonthly tabloid; some photography; production of leaflets, banners, buttons, etc. EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE. Responsibilities include writing, editing, proofreading bimonthly tabloid and other union publications. For both jobs, knowledge of desktop publishing is desirable, and Spanish is a plus. Send resumes to Newspaper, 13 Astor Place, New York, NY 10003.

Partnership for Democracy (formerly The Youth Project) is seeking a FIELD REPRESENTATIVE for the mid-Atlantic states. Responsibilities include policy and program planning; economic, political

and social analysis; developing knowledge of citizen groups; identifying, evaluating and recommending organizations (as well as providing technical assistance to such organizations); and fundraising. Experience in organizing and citizen participation work necessary. Familiarity with existing local, statewide and regional social-change projects required. Salary mid 20s; liberal benefits package. Resume, cover letter and three references to: Bob Nicklas, Deputy Director, Partnership for Democracy, 2335 18th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Application deadline November 24. EOE. Minorities and women are encouraged to apply.

LABOR ORGANIZER. RN Organizer for Southern California Central Valley. Must have previous organizing experience. Send resume: Rose Ann DeMoro, California Nurses Association, 11520 San Vicente #106, Los Angeles, CA 90049.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), the rank-and-file movement for reform in the Teamsters Union, needs ORGANIZER for major new democratic opening. Strong commitment to the labor movement a must. Salary low but negotiable. Benefits. Resume to TDU, Box 10128, Detroit, MI 48210, (313) 842-2600.

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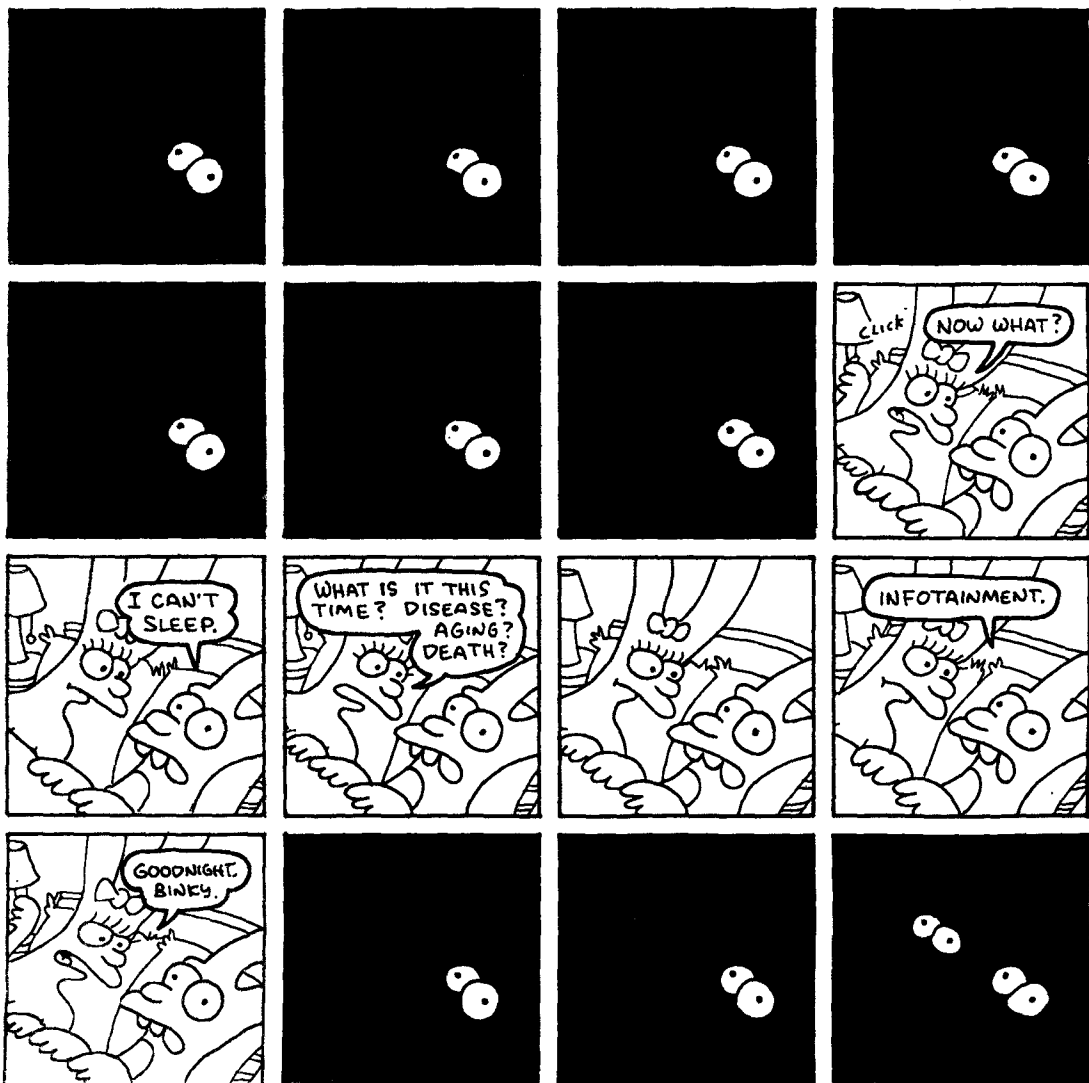
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